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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 24 MAY 2024 | FRIDAY | BENGALURU | 15 DHUL-QIDAH, 1445 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 124 | Pages: 8

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CONG WILL ARREST YOU FOR SAYING 'RAM RAM': PM

Ahead of polls, he says INDIA bloc will have 5 PMs in 5 years

MAHENDRAGARH, 23 MAY

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday claimed that if Congress has its way, it will arrest everyone who says "Ram Ram". He accused the party of dividing India and creating two Muslim nations to appease its vote bank.

Hours before campaigning for the sixth round of the seven-phase Lok Sabha polls came to an end, Modi at a rally in Haryana's Mahendragarh also claimed that INDIA bloc is talking about having five prime minieter's over the next five years. "The fight over 'ghee' has broken out in the alliance, even before the cow has given milk," he said.

Targeting West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, whose TMC like Congress is part of the INDIA bloc, Modi said though the Calcutta High Court has cancelled the OBC certificates given to Muslims in the last 10-to-12 years, she is not ready to accept the verdict.

"Till I am alive, no one can snatch the reservation for Dalits and tribals," he asserted.

> **What did they do in Bengal? They gave OBC certificates to Muslims overnight in Bengal. The reservation, which should have been given to OBCs, was being given to Muslims and that to too 'ghuspathaiyes' (infiltrators)**
>
> -Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

INDIA bloc is "extremely communal, casteist and nepotist", he said while alleging that when the Congress was in power, it did not allow the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Modi alleged that an "advisor" of the 'shehzada' -- a reference to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi -- has revealed that if Congress comes to power, it would want to put a lock on the Ram temple. The Congress has "insulted our 'astha' (devotion)", he said.

"Now INDI alliance people are saying, Muslims have the first right over the remaining part of India," Modi said as he accused it of indulging in appeasement politics.

SCs, STs and OBCs have been given reservation by the Constitution but "they want to snatch it and give it to those who do vote jihad", he said.

"What did they do in Bengal? They gave OBC certificates to Muslims overnight in Bengal," he said.

The reservation which should have been given to OBCs was being given to Muslims and that to too 'ghuspathaiyes' (infiltrators), Modi alleged.

After the first three phases of polling for the Lok Sabha elections, Modi said, the INDIA bloc started making grounds for whom to blame for their defeat. It has targeted the Election Commission on electoral data and electronic voting machines (EVMs), he said.

On the Congress raising the One Rank One Pension (OROP) issue, Modi alleged that the party had deceived ex-servicemen by depriving them of OROP for many decades. Congress is full of hatred for the army and soldiers, he charged.

—PTI

Farmers mark 100 days of 'Delhi Chalo'

Ambala, 23 May

Farmers assembled at Shambhu and other border points to mark the completion of 100 days of the ongoing protest to press the Centre to accept their demands, which includes a guarantee of MSP for crops. The farmers are camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points since 13 February when their 'Delhi Chalo' march was stopped by security forces. Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh leader Sarwan Pandher said they gathered at Shambhu, Khanauri and Dabwali border points for the occasion. *—PTI*

Govt to test water statewide to stop contamination

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: PTI**

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday said that the drinking water will be tested for contamination all over the State including Bengaluru to prevent water-borne diseases.

He told reporters, "There are reports of drinking water contamination in some parts of the State due to rains. This poses a risk of cholera and other water-borne diseases. Hence, we have instructed officials to carry out tests. We have had a discussion regarding this with the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah."

"Officials have been instructed to provide quality drinking water to people and carry out periodic tests. Instructions have also been given to repair all dysfunctional drinking water dispensing units," he said.

"The Chief Minister and I paid visits to many in-progress infrastructural works in Bengaluru. Chief Minister has given instructions to officials to complete certain works. A task force will also be constituted soon to oversee the progress of works in Bengaluru," he said.

He said in a bid to clear encroachments, it has been discussed with the Bangalore Metropolitan Task Force (BMTF). Asked about encroachers of Raja Kaluve and lakes getting stay orders for the planned demolition, he said the government will work within the legal framework.

—Salar News

BUDDHA PURNIMA

Monks perform special prayers on Buddha Purnima at Mahabodhi Society, Gandhi Nagar, in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: SALAR**

5 die of heatstroke as Rajasthan burns at 48.8°C

JAIPUR, 23 MAY

As Rajasthan continues to battle rising temperatures, five deaths due to suspected heat stroke were reported in the state on Thursday. The mercury soared to 48.8 degrees Celsius in Barmer, the highest temperature recorded this summer season, according to Met Centre Jaipur. Five peacocks were also found dead in Khairthal district, officials said. Barmer was followed by Phalodi with maximum temperature at 48.6 degrees degrees, Fatehpur at 47.6 degrees Celsius, Jaisalmer at 47.5 degrees Celsius, Jodhpur at 47.4 degrees Celsius, Jalore at 47.3 degrees Celsius, Kota at 47.2 degrees Celsius and Churu at 47 degrees Celsius. *—PTI*

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J&K women stop Vande Bharat to protest water crisis

JAMMU, 23 MAY

Women stopped the Vande Bharat train on Thursday by staging a protest at a railway station in Jammu against water crisis compounded by heatwave conditions. The demonstrators threatened to block all incoming and outgoing trains if the water crisis in their colony was not addressed urgently. Scores of women and some children from the Jammu East Colony marched to the Jammu railway station to protest against the administration's alleged failure to ensure a regular water supply. The protesters, some of them carrying buckets, stopped the Vande Bharat train at the station for a brief period before the authorities intervened. *—PTI*

In a first, Google to start Pixel production in TN

CHENNAI, 23 MAY

Google will partner with Foxconn to produce its Pixel smartphones for the first time in Tamil Nadu, Chief Minister MK Stalin said on Thursday. The decision to start its production unit was a result of negotiations initiated by the state government with Google management, he said and informed that the officials from Google would soon come to Chennai to meet him in this regard. Stalin has set an ambitious target of achieving one trillion USD by 2030. Accordingly, investors' meetings were held in Tamil Nadu, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan, Arab countries, and France, leading to the materialisation of Rs 9.61 lakh crore investment. *—PTI*

8 dead, 60 hurt in Thane boiler blast

THANE, 23 MAY

As many as eight people were killed and more than 60 injured following an explosion at a chemical factory in Maharashtra's Thane district on Thursday afternoon, officials said.

As a boiler exploded at Amudan Chemicals located in Phase 2 of Dombivli MIDC area around 1.40pm, the impact of the explosion and the resultant blaze affected adjacent factories.

As per the preliminary information, those killed were working in neighbouring factories, said Maharashtra industries minister Uday Samant. Five men and two women were killed in the incident but their bodies were charred beyond recognition, said Yasin Tadvi, Chief of the disaster management cell of the Thane Municipal Corporation.

Firefighters try to extinguish a fire that broke out due to a boiler blast in a chemicals factory in Thane district on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Besides fire brigade, police and local officials, the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) too was taking part in the rescue operation, officials said.

Minister Samant told PTI that the plant where the explosion took place was not in operation for the last few months and had restarted only a few days ago.

The blast was so loud that it was heard a kilometre away, an eyewitness said. Glass windows of adjoining buildings cracked while many houses in the vicinity were damaged, officials said.

Thick clouds of smoke could be seen hovering over the factory. *—PTI*

DRUGS WITH VET LABELS CREATE PANIC IN B'LURU

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Patients visiting government hospitals recently were shocked when they noticed that some drugs had labels of Animal Husbandry Veterinary Sciences (AHVS). The department concerned however has said it was only a logo related issue and that the medicines were indeed meant for human use.

According to sources in The Karnataka State Medical Supplies Corporation Limited , there were seven drugs which had the AHVS label. This included eye and nasal drops.

These drugs were supplied by a private firm with a total value of Rs 62.9 lakh and it reached the government warehouse on 5 January, this year. *—PTI*

Ch'garh forces kill 7 Naxals in encounter

NARAYANPUR, 23 MAY

Seven Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security personnel in a forest along Narayanpur-Bijapur inter-district border in Chhattisgarh on Thursday, police said.

The gunfight broke out around 11am when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation and the intermittent firing was still underway, Narayanpur Superintendent of Police (SP) Prabhat Kumar said.

Seven Naxalites in "Maoist uniform" have been gunned down in the exchange of fire so far, said the SP. The operation, involving personnel belonging to the District Reserve Guard from Dantewada, Narayanpur and Bastar districts, Bastar Fighters and Special Task Force – all units of state police – was launched based on inputs about the presence of cadres from Maoists' Indravati Area Committee and Platoon No. 16, he said. Altogether seven firearms have been recovered from the encounter site, he said.

The operation is still underway and further details were awaited, he added.

With this incident, 112 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in the state. *—PTI*

Phase 5 turnout now 62.2%, women voters surpass men

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The voter turnout in the fifth phase of Lok Sabha polls held on 20 May has now climbed to 62.2 per cent, the Election Commission (EC) said on Thursday with women outnumbering men.

According to EC, 61.48 per cent of the registered male voters turned up at the polling stations as compared to 63 per cent of female electors. In phase 5, 49 seats across six states and two union territories went for polling where over 8.95 crore people, including 4.69 crore men, 4.26 crore women and 5409 third gender were eligible to vote.

The participation of women in voting was higher as compared to men in Bihar, Jharkhand, Ladakh, Odisha and Uttar Pradesh. While in Bihar, the male turnout was 52.42 per cent, the female turnout was 61.58 per cent. Similarly, in Jharkhand, the male turnout was registered at 58.08 per cent, while the female turnout was 68.65 per cent. *—PTI*

In Phase 5, 49 seats across six states and two union territories went for polling **PHOTO: PTI**

POLLS ON SATURDAY

High-voltage 6th Phase campaign ends

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Campaigning ended on Thursday for the penultimate phase of Lok Sabha elections in 58 constituencies across six states and two Union territories, including all the seven seats in Delhi.

Besides the national capital, polling for the sixth round of the marathon seven-phase elections will be held Saturday in 14 seats in Uttar Pradesh, all 10 seats of Haryana, eight seats each in Bihar and West Bengal, six seats in Odisha, four seats in Jharkhand and one seat in Jammu and Kashmir. Till now, voting has been completed in 25 states and Union territories and 428 constituencies out of 543. The last phase of polling is scheduled on 1 June and counting of votes will be taken up on 4 June.

Congress' Rahul Gandhi at a poll campaign on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Among the key contestants are Dharmendra Pradhan (BJP) from Sambalpur (Odisha), Manoj Tiwari (BJP) and Kanhaiya Kumar (Congress) from North East Delhi, Maneka Gandhi (BJP) from Sultanpur (Uttar Pradesh), Mehbooba Mufti (PDP) from Anantnag-Rajouri (Jammu & Kashmir), Abhijit Gangopadhyay (BJP) from Tamluk (West Bengal), and BJP's Manohar Lal Khattar (Karnal, Haryana), Naveen Jindal (Kurukshetra) and Rao Inderjit Singh (Gurgaon).

With campaigning reaching fever pitch, the Election Commission (EC) took exception to utterances of star campaigners and on Wednesday directed the leaders of the ruling BJP to refrain from making speeches on religious and communal lines, and opposition Congress from potentially divisive statements on the socioeconomic composition of the armed forces. On the last day of campaigning, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a rally each in Punjab and Haryana. Congress's poll campaign was led by its chief Mallikarjun Kharge, senior leader Rahul Gandhi and Sachin Pilot among others. Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who was released on interim bail till 1 June, held roadshows in support of Congress' candidates while Pilot campaigned for AAP's South Delhi candidate Sahi Ram Pahalwan. *—PTI*

Power cuts grip City, BESCOM says all OK

Residents say BESCOM is not attending calls

MEGHANA PRASAD
BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Summer showers have cheered up Bengalureans, but the joy was short-lived as frequent power outages have disrupted the lives of residents. While Bangalore Electricity Supply Company Limited (BESCOM) says there are no scheduled cuts, residents claim that their power cut complaints often remain unheard by the officials. A few residents said most of the time BESCOM helpline does not respond and when the complaints are registered, power comes back only after 5-6 hours. Also, the engineers do shoddy repair work resulting in power outages repeating.

Vasanth Nagar, Jayanagar, HBR Layout, Bannerghatta, Koramangala and BTM Layout are some of the areas that face power cuts frequently. "The power gets cut during the night, making it all the more difficult for us to manage the heat. The power goes out for hours together and sometimes for the whole night as well," said Rajitha S, a resident of Banashankari.

Bharath Reddy, a resident of Whitefield, said: "My work gets disrupted and meetings get delayed due to power cuts. When we contacted BESCOM, they denied that they had cut the power and instead asked us to check our fuse or circuit of the house. Eventually, we will get the power back after seven to eight hours."

Sivaranjini Elango S from Lingarajapuram said, "I urge the BESCOM authorities to come up with a permanent solution for these constant power cuts."

Speaking to Salar News, Arvind Shetty, PRO of BESCOM, said there are no scheduled power cuts or load shedding in the City. The non-scheduled power outages are due to the adverse weather in the City.

"The intense heat during peak summer had caused circuit problems and voltage fluctuations, causing frequent power cuts. However, the recent rains have also impacted the power supply. Sometimes, transformers burst, and lines get cut off due to water and wind, leading to outages that can last for hours. These repairs can take a lot of time," he said.

Bengaluru's average daily power consumption is between 160 Megawatts (MW) and 200MW, according to BESCOM records. However, during the summer, this demand surges to 500MW or even 700MW daily. The City's peak power consumption in April 2024 reached 3,820MW, which is a significant jump from the consumption of 3,570MW in the corresponding month last year.

James Philip, a Load Dispatch Centre official, said out-of-age infrastructure and underground cables can cause frequent power cuts. "The constant power outages may be due to the frequent rains as well. Heavy rains and falling of tree branches can snap power lines," Philip said.

"If people have any problem with power outages, they can contact our helpline. The 1912 helpline can help the person to immediately get in touch with the BESCOM during power outages and we will look into the matter as soon as possible," Shetty added

—Salar News

SAVE THESE NUMBERS
BESCOM HELPLINE: **1912**
WHATSAPP NUMBERS ARE:
BENGALURU SOUTH - **8277884011**
BENGALURU WEST - **8277884012**
BENGALURU EAST - **8277884013**
BENGALURU NORTH - **8277884014**

Rave party in City: 2 Telugu actors, 84 others test positive for drugs

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Telugu actors Hema and Ashi Roy were allegedly among the 86 people who tested positive for consumption of drugs at a rave party titled "Vasu's Birthday: Sunset to Sunrise," at a farmhouse in Singena Agrahara near Electronics City.

The police are yet to make any arrests, said Deputy Superintendent of Police, Anekal subdivision, Mohan Kumar BS.

He told reporters, "We have not arrested any actress. We have collected 30 urine samples from those present at the party."

The rave party, organised by KL Vasu, was busted by the Central Crime Branch (CCB) near Electronics City and most of those who attended the event were from outside the State.

City Police Commissioner B Dayananda on Tuesday said, "On the night of 19 May, acting on a tip-off, CCB raided a farmhouse at Electronics City. Around 100 people were at the event where drugs and narcotic substances were found."

It is learnt that more than 50 men and close to 30 women tested positive for drug consumption. The special wing of CCB police sleuths is preparing to send notices to these individuals and call them for questioning.

Hema had released a video claiming that she was in Hyderabad when the party was on.

However, Dayananda later confirmed her presence at the party and added that she had made the video at the rave.

—Salar News

PRAJWAL ON THE RUN

Return or face my anger: Deve Gowda warns grandson

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Thursday issued a 'stern warning' to his grandson and suspended party MP, Prajwal Revanna, asking him to return to the country. He urged him to face probe into sexual abuse allegations, while asserting there will be no interference from him or other family members into the enquiry.

He asked Prajwal, the party's Hassan MP who is facing allegations of sexual harassment of many women, to return to India and surrender before the police. Prajwal had flown reportedly to Germany in the last week of April.

He reiterated that his grandson should be given the harshest punishment under the law "if found guilty".

"If he does not heed this warning, he will have to face my anger and anger of all his family members. The law will take care of the accusations against him, but not listening to the family will ensure his total isolation. If he has any respect left for me, he has to return immediately," Gowda said. "It took me some time to recover from the shock and pain he (Prajwal) has inflicted on me, my entire family, my colleagues, friends and party workers," the nonagenarian leader said.

Stating that he was aware that people had spoken 'harshest' words against him and his family in the last few weeks, apparently over the issue, Gowda said he would not wish to stop them, criticise them and argue with them saying "that they should have waited until all the facts were found out". *—PTI*

CM writes to PM again to cancel Prajwal's passport

BENGALURU, 22 MAY

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday has written a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel the diplomatic Prajwal. He said that it is "disheartening" that his previous letter on the issue had not been acted-upon, despite the gravity of the situation.

He earlier on 1 May had written to Modi urging him to move the MEA and Home Affairs to take swift action to cancel the passport.

Accusing Prajwal of abusing his diplomatic privileges to flee the country and to escape criminal proceedings, he said, State has taken prompt actions to meet the ends of justice by setting up a SIT for investigation of the matter.

"It is a matter of serious concern that the accused Prajwal Revanna has managed to remain in hiding to this day despite the issue of a Look Out Circular, a Blue Corner Notice and two notices by the Investigating Officer under section 41A CrPC. *—PTI*

Centre ready to cooperate in bringing back Prajwal: Joshi

KALABURAGI, 23 MAY

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi on Thursday said there is a process to cancel the diplomatic passport of suspended JD(S) MP Prajwal Revanna. He asserted that the Centre is ready to cooperate in bringing him back to country.Hitting out at the State, he questioned why they did not file a case and detain Prajwal, before he left for abroad. He also accused Congress dispensation of trying to put the blame on the Centre and playing politics on the issue. Joshi was reacting to a question on Chief Minister Siddarmaiah writing a second letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging him to take "prompt and necessary" actions to cancel passport of Prajwal. *—PTI*

Police nab 5, recover ₹32 lakh in Vijayapura robbery

VIJAYAPURA, 23 MAY

Vijayapura police have arrested five people for the robbery of Rs 32 lakh from a canter truck. The arrested include the canter driver Mahantesh Talwar. District Superintendent of Police Rishikesh Sonavane said the stolen money has been recovered. The incident happened on 17 May. The other accused are Dharesh Dalwai, Shivappa Mashyala, Sunila Vaddara and Shivananda Dalwai. The money belonged to Chandrakanta Gurupadappa Kumbar, a cotton trader in Jevargi. The money was being transported to Jevargi after a sale in Aminabavi, Dharwad district. The truck was intercepted near Uppaladinni Cross in Kolhara town. Talwar had orchestrated the robbery, during which two occupants of the canter were assaulted. *—Salar News*

Poonja attends police inquiry, gets station bail

MANGALURU, 23 MAY

BJP MLA Harish Poonja appeared before the Belthangady police in Dakshina Kannada district for an inquiry pertaining to two cases registered against him and was granted station bail, police sources said on Thursday. BJP leader was summoned for interrogation by the police on Wednesday evening. While the first case was registered for allegedly pressurising the police to release a party worker who was arrested for illegal quarrying, the second case was filed for staging a protest in front of the Taluk office against the FIR registered against him. On 18 May, Poonja had barged into the Belthangady police station demanding Shashiraj Shetty's release. Subsequently, he was booked under the IPC sections 143, 147, 341, 504, and 506. During the protest, Poonja had allegedly abused local police officers and the Tahsildar and ridiculed the Superintendent of Police. On 22 May night, Harish Poonja surrendered before the police and was questioned in connection with the cases, following high drama at his residence. *—PTI*

Bollywood actor Parineeti Chopra at an event held for differently-abled people in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: SALAR**

Manhunt underway for railway staff's murderer

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

A sketch of the accused

Five special teams have been formed by South Western Railway (SWR) Police and Government Railway Police (GRP) to track down the culprits of the Puducherry-Dadar express also known as Chalukya express murder case which took place on 16 May.

According to a press release, SWR the GRP has captured CCTV footage of the murderer at various stations and identified the accused. Speaking to **Salar News**, Dr Soumyalatha SK, the Superintendent of Police (Railways) said, "We have given a lookout notice to all the railway personnel in the state and the city. We are currently on a manhunt for this culprit."

A railway housekeeping staff member was fatally stabbed by an unknown passenger who was travelling ticketless on Puducherry-Dadar express also known as Chalukya express in the sleeper coach. The deceased Devarshi verma was stabbed in the chest to death by an unknown passenger between the Gunji- Khanapur section at 5 pm on 16 May. The on-duty Ticket examiner and a passenger were also injured.

The SWR police said that the police have managed to crack five other murder cases that happened within SWR limits.

—Salar News

EMAILS SENT

3 five star hotels in City receive hoax bomb threats

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

Two weeks after schools and hospitals received the hoax bomb threat, three hotels in the City received hoax threat emails in the early hours of Thursday.

The Deputy Commissioner of South East CK Baba said, "In the early hours, three five-star hotels in Bengaluru received hoax bomb threat emails from an email address under the name "daudee jiwal." The emails claimed to be from the son of a senior IPS officer, accusing his father of colluding with Pakistan-based ISI and a Tamil Nadu political family to orchestrate bombings to divert attention from a drug scandal involving the Tamil Nadu political family."

The cop said, email also suggested that the hotels be evacuated by 2.30 p.m. The police, following a complaint, carried out searches and concluded it as a hoax and the police have stepped up a probe to identify the source of the mail. Speaking about the increased Hoax bomb threats in the City City Commissioner B Dayananda said, " The police have registered 27 FIRs in connection with the hoax bomb threats alone. The threats email sent to the city have used proxy servers and masked virtual private networks." *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

HOAX THREATS IN THE PAST

- 14 May: 8 schools received bomb threats
- 13 May: 6 hospitals received threats
- 29 April: Kempegowda International Airport received threat
- 5 March: KSRTC received threat via email
- 2 March: Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar and other ministers receive a bomb threat email, along with the ransom demand of Rs 20 crore
- 5 February: Principal of Kendra Vidyalaya IISC in Yeshwanthpur received an email threat
- 5 January: A museum and an art gallery in Bengaluru received threatening emails

MLC polls: Raghupati Bhat gets BJP notice for fighting as Ind

MANGALURU, 23 MAY

BJP in on Thursday issued a notice to former MLA Raghupati Bhat, who is contesting the upcoming MLC elections on 3 June, as an independent candidate from the South-West Graduates' constituency.

Citing his decision to contest the election against BJP's official candidate, in violation of party discipline, the disciplinary committee President Lingaraj Patil issued a notice to Bhat asking him to provide clarification before the committee within two days.

The rebel leader was expecting an MLC ticket for the Karnataka South West Graduates' constituency and had lobbied hard for it, but the party decided to field Dhananjaya Sarji. He had been sulking ever since the BJP denied him a ticket in the 2023 Assembly election and fielded Yashpal Suvarna who won the election. *—PTI*

CITY TRAFFIC MGT INSTALLS 890 AI CAMERAS

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

The City police proposes installation of new set of 890 AI-based CCTV cameras at over 500 places across the city. According to City traffic police, "The new set of cameras will add to the existing 7,500 cameras installed across 3,000 places around the city, 2,500 out of the existing ones are defected." The 2,500 cameras will be revived and linked to the command centre by end of June, said the city traffic police. The cameras will be installed at strategic locations, under the safe city project, to help in traffic management, monitor any untoward incident like road rage.

—Salar News

5-point programme will improve City infra: DKS

BENGALURU, 23 MAY

DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: PTI**

With Karnataka expecting above normal monsoon rains, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday directed district administrations to take necessary precautionary measures to tackle the situation arising due to heavy rains, and asked them to ensure preparedness for sowing and other agricultural activities to be taken up by farmers.

The CM and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar held a meeting through video conferencing with Deputy Commissioners and CEOs of Zilla Panchayats of all districts to review the monsoon preparations besides the drought relief activities so far.

Shivakumar said the government has worked out a five-point programme to address infrastructural issues faced by Bengaluru. Speaking to reporters after attending a meeting at the office of ITP, he said, "The five-point programme includes drinking water, pothole filling, widening of property tax net, property tax collection, clearance of encroachment of raja kaluve and lakes.

"The Courts had directed the government to clear encroachment of rajakaluve. As per the directions, the government had identified 2,626 encroachments. As many as 556 encroachments were cleared by 2022-23. Besides the old encroachments, 1,136 new encroachments have been identified. The BMTF has been instructed to clear these encroachments," he said.

"The Chief Minister has informed that there are over 5,000 potholes in Bengaluru. The BBMP has been instructed to fill up all the potholes in the next 15 days. An App will be released after soon where citizens can report potholes to the authorities by uploading a photo and the location," he added.

Officials have been instructed to take up pre monsoon preparations like dredging, removal of obstructions for the flow of water to tanks, rivers and other water bodies, the CM said adding all precautionary measures should be taken up at places prone to flooding.

Regular kharif sowing will start from June across the state in about 80 lakh hectare.

Regarding the drought relief to affected farmers, Siddaramaiah said his government has provided Rs 2,000 each to about 34 lakh farmers, and the Rs 3,454 crore National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) funds from the Centre has also been distributed to the peasants. *—Salar News*

CONFUSION PREVAILS

New licence rules: Driving schools cry foul

VAISHNAVI GOPALRAJ
BENGALURU, 23 MAY

With new driving licence rules coming into effect in the country on 1 June, many private driving schools in Bengaluru have demanded clarity on the new regulations. Under the new rules, private driving schools must have a training area of a minimum of one acre (two acres for training on four wheels) to impart lessons. "If we go by the new rules, where in Bengaluru we can get one to two acres for training," Manjunath BC, owner of Rainbow Driving School in City, told Salar News. "Private driving schools mainly cater to people in their locality. We cannot afford to buy this much land in our neighbourhood with the real estate prices skyrocketing in the City."

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Another private driving school owner in the City said: "Centre and State government must bring clarity on building driving schools in a one- or two-acre property."

The owner of AS Motor Driving School said, "Under the new rule, the schools must have access to a suitable testing facility. In the rules, there is no mention of what suitable testing is and what are the protocols?"

Another bone of contention is Accredited Driver Training Centres (ADTCs). The new rules say licences will be issued by ADTCs only. "Who is the official in charge of ADTC and how will we come under them," another private driving school owner in the City said. Karnataka Motor Driving Training School Owners' Association General Secretary HC Nagaraj said, "We have written to Transport Department and are yet to get a response on this. Around 2,000 driving schools are operating in the City and all of them are confused by the new rules." An official from the office of State Transport Minister told Salar News, "We are waiting for a response from the Centre to get clarity on the new rules."

—Salar News

New driving rules

RTO not required for driving tests: Driving test will be conducted at accredited private driving schools and they will provide the certificate.

Penalties: Rs 1K to Rs 2K fine for driving without licence

Training Syllabus: For Light Motor Vehicles, there will be 29 hours of training - 8 hours for theory and 21 for practical. For Heavy Motor Vehicles, 38 hours training; out of which 8 hours of theory and 31 hours of practical.

How to apply: Driving schools can submit their application at the official website Parivahan.

PHOTO: PTI

Saran violence: Lalu's daughter named in FIR

SARAN/PATNA, 23 MAY

RJD President Lalu Prasad's daughter Rohini Acharya has been named in one of the FIRs registered in connection with "irregularities" during polling in Bihar's Saran Lok Sabha constituency and post-poll clashes leading to the death of one person there earlier this week., officials said on Thursday. Acharya was the Mahagathbandhan candidate in Saran against BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy. The state government extended the suspension on internet services in the district by two more days till 25 May, while the process to attach properties of the absconding accused was initiated, officials said. One person was killed and two others were injured in post-poll violence at Bada Telpa area in Saran on Tuesday morning. Two people have been so far arrested. —*PTI*

U'khand BJP files plaint against fake video of Dhami

DEHRADUN, 23 MAY

The Uttarakhand BJP has lodged a police complaint against the Aam Aadmi Party, accusing it of tarnishing the image of Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and the party by posting an edited video of him on social media. On the complaint of Pradesh BJP IT cell co-convenor Praveen Lekhwar, an FIR was filed at the Dalanwala Police Station in Dehradun in the matter on Wednesday, state BJP media in-charge Manveer Chauhan said. A video of Dhami was tampered with and circulated on Instagram by AAP's social media cell as part of a conspiracy to tarnish the image of Dhami and the BJP, Lekhwar alleged in his complaint. The video alleged to have been edited is of a statement given by Dhami during an election campaign in Delhi..—*PTI*

Fake voter ID: Arunachal rights panel takes note

ITANAGAR, 23 MAY

The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) has taken cognizance of a complaint filed by a woman against election officers in Changlang district for their alleged inaction over "forged" voter ID of a person. The woman had lodged the complaint to the Election Commission in June last year, alleging that the Changlang district electoral officer (DEO) and the electoral registration officer (ERO) did not take action against the person who was accused of "fraudulently obtaining a fake voter identity card". The accused had filed his nomination for the Bordumsa-Diyun constituency in March this year but his bid was rejected. —*PTI*

'EC wrong in telling Cong not to politicise Agnipath'

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Thursday said the Election Commission was "egregiously wrong" in directing his party not to 'politicise' the Agnipath scheme, asserting that it is the right of an Opposition party to criticise a policy of the government. The Election Commission Wednesday came down heavily on the ruling BJP and opposition Congress, asking them to desist from campaigning along caste, community, language, and religious lines. EC also asked Congress not to politicise defence forces and make potentially divisive statements regarding the socio-economic composition of the armed forces. "It is the right of an Opposition political party to criticise a policy of the government and declare that, if voted to power, the scheme will be scrapped," he said.—*PTI*

BJP woman leader killed in Bengal, tensions flare

In Nandigram, BJP workers clashed with cops; shops shut

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Barely two days ahead of the parliamentary polls, a woman BJP worker was killed in Nandigram in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district, triggering large-scale protests by the saffron party activists there on Thursday, police said.

The region, which falls under the Tamluk Lok Sabha seat and is considered to be the backyard of Bengal's Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari, is scheduled to vote on 25 May in the sixth phase of the elections.

BJP workers burnt tyres, blocked roads and pulled down shutters of shops in Nandigram, alleging that the TMC-backed criminals were involved in the killing of Rathibala Arhi, 38, a saffron party worker in Sonachura village.

Police, central forces and RAF personnel deployed in the area had to restore to lathicharge to disperse the mob, officials said, adding a person was detained by police in connection with the alleged murder. BJP called a bandh in Nadigram as part of its protest

A police personnel tries to douse a fire during a protest led by BJP against West Bengal government at Bangal Bhawan on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PTI

but withdrew it later, a local BJP leader said.

Arhi was killed and several others were injured after unidentified and armed motorcycle-borne assailants attacked them late Wednesday night, a police officer said. "Arhi and several other party workers were tasked with the job of guarding a local polling booth last night after poll campaigns in the area ended for the day. TMC-backed criminals attacked them. She was murdered and others were left badly injured," BJP's district general secretary Meghnadh Paul said.Among the seven people reportedly injured, the condition of one was critical and the person was shifted to a hospital in Kolkata, he said.

> **People desire to live in a peaceful environment. Therefore, they are eagerly waiting to vote for BJP candidates to escape the misrule of TMC. TMC government is presiding over misrule here, prompting people to seek an escape**
>
> -Manik Saha, Tripura Chief Minister

TMC leader in Nandigram, Swadesh Das said, "There were some family disputes and the killing could be the consequence of that."

BJP accused TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee of "instigating" violence in Nandigram ahead of the May 25 polls there. "The violence happened owing to instigation by the Chief Minister and her nephew," BJP's state general secretary and spokesperson Jagannath Chattopadhyay said at a press conference here. Abhishek Banerjee is considered number two in the ruling party of West Bengal. —*PTI*

Delhi Chief Minister during a roadshow for Lok Sabha polls at Malviya Nagar, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

Won't resign as it will set precedent: Kejri

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said he would not resign because it will set a precedent and give BJP-led Central government a free hand to target Opposition Chief Ministers, including Mamata Banerjee and MK Stalin. And this, he said, is very dangerous for democracy.

Kejriwal said he will approach the court to allow him to fulfil his duties as Chief Minister of Delhi from prison.

He was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on 21 March in connection with a money laundering case related to his government's liquor excise policy. BJP has been demanding his resignation since he has been arrested by the probe agency.

Kejriwal and his party have accused BJP government of framing him, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and other leaders in "fake cases".

"I worked in the slums of Delhi after resigning from the post of income tax commissioner. Nobody had asked for my resignation when I stepped down within 49 days (in 2013) after becoming the chief minister of Delhi. In a way, I kicked the chair of the chief minister while nobody gives up even a peon's job," he said.

"I did not resign as Chief Minister deliberately this time as it is part of my struggle." Kejriwal said AAP got 67 Assembly seats (in 2015) and 62 seats (in 2020), and added that Prime Minister Narendra Modi hatched a conspiracy to arrest him because he saw AAP cannot be defeated in elections in Delhi.

"He got me arrested so that I would resign and my government would topple. But I will not let his conspiracy succeed. This whole case (excise police scam case) is completely a fake case.

"So wherever BJP loses elections, the Chief Ministers of Opposition-ruled states will be arrested," Kejriwal said, adding that their governments would then be toppled, which is very dangerous for democracy.

According to the law, a person convicted with two years of sentencing cannot contest an MLA election, the AAP leader said. —*PTI*

'BJP WILL WIN DOUBLE-DIGIT VOTE'

BJP filling Hindutva void left by Jayalalithaa, says Annamalai

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

BJP is filling the void in Tamil Nadu politics left by the death of AIADMK supremo and former chief minister J Jayalalithaa, who was a "far superior" Hindutva leader, the BJP's state chief K Annamalai has said.

In an interaction with PTI Editors here, Annamalai said he is confident that the BJP will get a double-digit vote share in Tamil Nadu in the Lok Sabha elections and emerge as a third major party in the southern state.

The IPS officer-turned-politician said he will not let the BJP play second fiddle to any political party in Tamil Nadu, where there is a great scope

K Annamalai PHOTO: PTI

for his party to fill the void created by the AIADMK's "drifting away" from the Hindutva ideology after Jayalalithaa's passing.

"Now, if you look at it, sir, till Jayalalithaaji was alive, she was a far superior Hindutva leader than anybody in Tamil Nadu. Pre-2014, when you have a party like the BJP and Jayalalithaa as a leader ... the natural choice of a Hindu voter would be Jayalalithaa, who displayed her Hindu identity openly," Annamalai said.

He said Jayalalithaa was the first politician in the country, other than BJP leaders, to support the cause of a Ram temple in Ayodhya and enact an anti-conversion law in Tamil Nadu in 2002-03.

The Tamil Nadu BJP chief said that after Jayalalithaa's demise in 2016, the AIADMK drifted away from the Hindutva ideals and joined hands with the Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), an outfit considered as the political arm of the banned Islamist organisation Popular Front of India (PFI). —*PTI*

Big guns missing in Maneka's campaign

SULTANPUR, 23 MAY

In Sultanpur, near high-profile Amethi, BJP's Maneka Gandhi appears to be fighting a lone battle to retain her parliamentary seat with few top leaders of her party canvassing for her and no Opposition biggies campaigning against her either.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed a public meeting in support of Maneka Gandhi in Qazipur on Wednesday.

Her nephew Rahul Gandhi and niece Priyanka Gandhi Vadra have visited Uttar Pradesh multiple times to canvass for INDIA bloc candidates but have not campaigned against her.

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) Chief Mayawati campaigned in Sultanpur in support of her party's candidate Udraj

Maneka Gandhi PHOTO: PTI

Verma, an OBC, on Wednesday and attacked both BJP and Congress. Despite little help from the BJP's big guns, Maneka Gandhi is confident of steering her party to victory in Sultanpur, which was represented by Varun Gandhi before 2019. In the 2019 she had won the Sultanpur seat by a margin of 14,000 seats.

She said the people of her constituency are happy about the opening of the Ram temple in Ayodhya but "it is not an issue in the polls here". —*PTI*

PEOPLE CALL HER MAA: VARUN IN HIS 1ST RALLY

SULTANPUR, 23 MAY

BJP leader and Pilibhit MP Varun Gandhi reached Sultanpur on Thursday to campaign for his mother Maneka Gandhi who is in the fray from the seat on a BJP ticket.

"Elections are going on everywhere in the country... but there is only one region in the country where people don't call their MP, Sansad ji, Mantri ji, or by her name, but call her mata ji," Varun said amid applause from the people gathered to hear him. This is the first time Varun has addressed any such rally this election season. He has remained out of the public ever since he was replaced by with Jitin Prasada from Pilibhit. —*PTI*

Governor trying to saffronise varsities: Kerala

T'PURAM, 23 MAY

Kerala Higher Education Minister R Bindu on Thursday alleged that big attempts were being made by Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, as Chancellor of Universities in the state, to "saffronise" the varsities.

The allegation by the minister was made while referring to the recent Kerala High Court order quashing the nominations made by Khan to the senate of the University of Kerala and directing him to select fresh nominees within a period of six weeks.

Bindu welcomed the High Court's decision and claimed that the students nominated by the Chancellor did not have an outstanding academic record and neither did they excel in the fields of arts, science, sports or humanities. "Instead, they were nominated as they were members of ABVP," she alleged. She said that many of Khan's interventions have resulted in "sullying" the higher education in the state. She further contended that there were court verdicts that prove that many of his interventions were not correct. While quashing the nominations made by Khan, court had observed that "there is no unbridled power vested with the Chancellor while making the nominations in terms of the statutory provisions." —*PTI*

Not giving clean-chit, Kejri was home: Maliwal

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Recounting her ordeal of 13 May, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Thursday said that she was assaulted by Bibhav Kumar, personal aide of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal adding that she is not giving "clean-chit" to anyone.

She said that she is not aware whether she was beaten on the instructions of anyone or by himself or of his own accord and that this is all a matter of investigation. "Everything is a matter of investigation. I am very cooperative with the Delhi Police. I am not giving anyone the clean chit. Because the fact is I was in the drawing room and Kejriwal was at home and I was beaten up very badly. I was literally screaming very badly but no one came to help to out. I never thought what will happen to me and my career. What will they do with me? she said with tears in her eyes.

Keep parents out of it: Kejri

Meanwhile, Delhi Police may not visit Kejriwal's residence to question his parents in connection with the "assault" case.

Swati Maliwal PHOTO: ANI

On Wednesday, Kejriwal had said police were going to question his elderly and ill parents the next day.

BJP however on Thursday said that no one should hamper the probe into the alleged assault on Maliwal, claiming it is part of the investigation to ascertain who were present at Kejriwal's residence and the role they played when the incident occurred.

"Who all were present at Kejriwal's residence from his family and office, the role they played and what they witnessed when Maliwal was being beaten up are part of the investigation. I am a spokesperson of the BJP, not the police," Union Minister Smriti Irani said at a press conference. —*ANI/PTI*

UNJUSTLY TARGETED, SAYS JAYANT SINHA ON BJP NOTICE

RANCHI, 23 MAY

After BJP issued a showcause notice to former Union Minister and MP Jayant Sinha asking him why he did not vote in the ongoing elections or participate in the campaigning, the latter responded said that he was "surprised" to receive the notice and was being "unjustly targeted".

Sinha in his letter also clarified that he voted through the postal ballot process as he was overseas due to personal commitments. He said that he had informed the Speaker and left India on May 10 to attend to some pressing personal commitments overseas adding that the party had not asked him to participate in any events, so he saw no reason to stay.

"Your approach demoralizes dedicated party workers and undermines the party's collective efforts. Additionally, despite my loyalty and hard work for the party, it appears that I am being unjustly targeted," Sinha said. —*ANI*

BJP crossed 310, Cong not even 40: Shah on 5 phases of elections

SIDDHARTHNAGAR, 23 MAY

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday claimed that in the first five rounds of polling, "BJP has crossed 310" and that Congress Party is "not even getting 40 seats" this time.

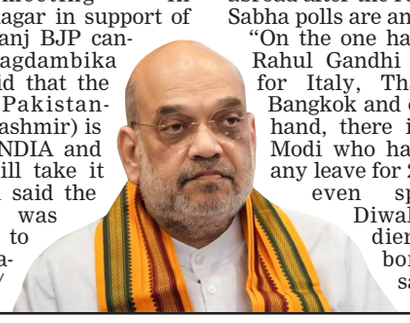
"INDIA alliance has been wiped out in the first five phases. I am telling you, this time Congress is not even getting 40 seats and Akhilesh Yadav will not even get four seats," said Shah addressing a poll meeting in Siddharthnagar in support of Domariyaganj BJP candidate Jagdambika Pal. He said that the PoK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) is a part of INDIA and the BJP will take it back. Shah said the opposition was attempting to end reservation for SC/ST and OBC.

"Rahul Baba and Akhilesh Yadav you have been blinded by vote banks politics. We will finish reservation on the basis of religion and give it back to the ST/ST and OBCs," he said.

He also pointed out that the INDIA bloc did not have any Prime Minister face and claimed the alliance, if it comes to power, will have five Prime Ministers. "Can the country run like this?"

Shah alleged Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav have booked tickets for a vacation abroad after the results of Lok Sabha polls are announced.

"On the one hand, there is Rahul Gandhi who leaves for Italy, Thailand and Bangkok and on the other hand, there is Narendra Modi who has not taken any leave for 23 years and even spends his Diwali with soldiers on the border," he said. —*PTI*



'Double engine will bulldoze Odisha mafia'

Bhubaneswar, 23 May

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and senior BJP leader Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said if the 'double engine' government is formed in Odisha, bulldozers will be used against all kinds of mafia. The term "double engine" is used by BJP leaders to refer to the party being in power at the Centre as well as in a state. "Corruption increases then poor are exploited," he alleged. —*PTI*

VOLUME UP

Poll songs connect candidates with voters & boost campaign

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

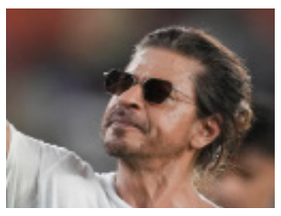
From singing the praises of candidates' roots and family legacies to highlighting their personality traits, playful campaign songs have struck a chord with voters here this election season with their liberal use of catchy phrases in local dialects.

The dialects and languages used in these songs -- from Hindi and Bhojpuri to Haryanvi and Punjabi -- are reflective of the linguistic and cultural diversities of the national capital, inhabited by people from all parts of the country. 'Phir se Modiji ki sarkar dekhna chahusu' (want to see a Modi government once again) is one such Haryanvi song renting the air at the rallies of BJP candidates. BJP bigwigs have got composed several songs that also talk about their roots.

BJP has released songs like 'Tabhi sab Modi ko chunte hain' to take on the INDIA bloc PHOTO: PTI

Congress has fielded Kanhaiya Kumar from the North East Delh. 'Dham Dham Dharam Dharaiya Re dekhao aaya Kanhiya re,' is Kanhaiya Kumar's campaign song. BJP has also released several party songs -- like 'Tabhi sab Modi ko chunte hain (That's why all elect Modi)" -- to take on the the INDIA bloc which has emphasised unity among its constituents through its 'Team India hain hum (we are team India)' song. AAP'song, 'Jail ke jawab mein hum vote denge (we will avenge the imprisonment through votes)' aims to tap into people "anger" over Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest and transform it into votes.

—*PTI*



SRK discharged from hospital after suffering heatstroke

PUNE, 23 MAY

Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, who was admitted to a private hospital in Ahmedabad after suffering from a heatstroke, was discharged from the facility on Thursday, a police official said. The actor was admitted to the multi-speciality KD Hospital here on Wednesday. The private hospital has not yet issued any statement on Khan's health condition. The actor was in Ahmedabad on Tuesday to attend IPL match of his KKR team at the Narendra Modi Stadium. Several parts of Gujarat have been reeling under a severe heatwave for the last couple of days.—*PTI*

2 get 10-yr jail as gangrape surfaces after 3 decades

SHAHJAHANPUR, 23 MAY

Three decades after they raped and impregnated a 12-year-old girl, two brothers were sentenced to 10 years in prison in a case that surfaced after the victim's son enquired about his father. Government counsel Rajiv Awasthi on Thursday said, "The court of Additional Sessions Judge Lavi Singh Yadav on Wednesday convicted Guddu Hasan and Naki Hasan in the gang-rape case." Naki Hasan (55) and Guddu Hasan (52) were arrested in 2022 after a case was lodged at Sadar Bazar police station on 4 March, 2021. According to the police report, the victim was living in the Sadar Bazar area of Shahjahanpur with her sister and brother-in-law in 1994. Naki Hasan, who lived in her locality, entered the house when she was alone and raped her. His younger brother Guddu Hasan also raped her. The victim alleged that she was raped by both the accused on multiple occasions.—*PTI*

Lakhimpur tense after accused dies in police custody

LAKHIMPUR, 23 MAY

Tension prevailed in Assam's Lakhimpur after a person accused of mobile phone theft died in police custody, leading to protests in Khelmati area, officials said. Two police personnel have been placed under suspension, they said. The accused was arrested along with four others on charges of mobile phone theft and other electronic gadgets by officials of the Khelmati outpost on Wednesday night. Lakhimpur Additional Superintendent of Police (Headquarters) LK Deka said the accused, who was sitting on a bench inside the police station, suddenly fell down and was immediately rushed to the civil hospital where he was declared "brought dead" by doctors. "Since the death happened inside the police station, a departmental inquiry will be conducted," he added. —*PTI*

Stray dogs attacking beachgoers in Goa on the rise

PANAJI, 24 MAY

A government-appointed lifesaving agency in Goa on Thursday said several incidents of stray dogs attacking citizens have taken place in the state of late. In separate incidents, three lifesavers of the agency were also attacked by packs of stray dogs on different beaches of the state, Drishti Marine Lifesavers, which has been given the task of lifeguarding the beaches, said in a statement. Two foreign nationals - a woman from Russia and Canada each - were bitten by stray dogs in two separate incidents on Benaulim beach in April, while actor Rayya Labib sustained bruises after she was chased by stray dogs.—*PTI*

Five dead in Kerala as rain causes floods, red alert on

Red alert is in Ernakulam and Thrissur, nine are on orange alert

Firemen remove fallen trees after rainfall in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

KOCHI, 23 MAY

Heavy rains continued to lash several parts of Kerala on Thursday, leading to waterlogging in the low-lying areas of major cities including Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Thrissur. The heavy showers have resulted in at least five deaths.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued red alert in Ernakulam and Thrissur and orange alert in nine districts of the state.

Flights from Kozhikode International Airport have been delayed due to heavy rains, official sources said.

The KSRTC bus stand at Kochi was flooded in the heavy rains that lashed the city last night. According to TV visuals, many major roads in Kochi city have been waterlogged, resulting in heavy traffic blocks. Police officials can be seen diverting traffic at various places in the city.

Many places in Thrissur city were also inundated in the torrential rains.

The IMD has issued an orange alert in Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Idukki, Thrissur, Palakkad, Malappuram, Kozhikode and Wayanad districts of the state.

A red alert indicates heavy to extremely heavy rain of over 20 cm in 24 hours, while an orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm, and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

Meanwhile, four shutters of the Malankara dam in Idukki district were raised and the authorities have warned the people living along the banks of Thodupuzha, Moovattupuzha rivers to remain cautious of rising waters. Many roads in various places have been reported to be damaged by the heavy waterlogging and rain in northern districts of the state.

Kerala State Disaster Management Authority warned the fishermen not to venture into the sea. —*PTI*

Severe cyclone to hit Bengal on Sunday

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

A cyclonic storm developing in the Bay of Bengal is likely to reach near the coasts of West Bengal and adjoining Bangladesh on 26 May as a severe cyclone, the Met department said on Thursday. On 26 and 27 May very heavy rainfall at isolated locations, over the coastal districts of West Bengal and Odisha is predicted. The weather office warned fishermen not to venture into the north Bay of Bengal till Sunday. —*PTI*

6 flights diverted after lightning hits Goa airport

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Six flights have been diverted after lightning struck the Manohar International Airport (MIA) in Goa and caused damage to the runway edge lights, an official said.
Lightning struck the airport, located at Mopa in North Goa, at around 5.15 pm on Wednesday, a spokesperson of the MIA said in a statement. —*PTI*

CID REVEALS

Bangladesh MP's friend paid ₹5cr to murder him

KOLKATA, 23 MAY

Anwarul Azim **PHOTO: PTI**

- The initial probe into the "murder" of Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anar revealed that one of his close friends, a US citizen, had paid around Rs 5 crore to kill him, a senior police officer claimed here on Thursday.

The initial probe into the "murder" of Bangladesh MP Anwarul Azim Anar revealed that one of his close friends, a US citizen, had paid around Rs 5 crore to kill him, a senior police officer claimed here on Thursday.

The Awami League MP's friend owns a flat in Kolkata, and is probably in the US at present, he said.

Police also said that the flat in Kolkata's New Town area, where the Bangladesh MP was last seen entering, was rented out to his friend by its owner, an excise department employee.

Anar, who went missing in Kolkata on 13 May, was found murdered and three people have been arrested, Bangladesh Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan had said on Wednesday.

West Bengal Police had said investigation of the case has been taken up by the state CID.

Akhilesh Chaturvedi, IG, CID, had Wednesday said police had "reliable inputs" that Anar "may have been murdered", but his body was yet to be recovered.

The state CID has found blood stains inside the New Town flat and also recovered several plastic bags, which they believe were used to dump the body parts.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that the MP was first strangulated and then his dead body was mutilated in several parts, police claimed.

"The body parts were probably put inside plastic bags and scattered at different locations. We also suspect that some parts were kept in a refrigerator and we have collected samples," the officer said.

The search for the missing MP, who reportedly arrived in Kolkata on 12 May to undergo medical treatment, began six days later after Gopal Biswas, a resident of Baranagar in north Kolkata and an acquaintance of the Bangladeshi politician, filed a complaint with the police on 18 May.

Anar had stayed at Biswas's house upon arrival.

—*PTI*

The police car is seen driving through a crowded emergency ward **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Blistering heat sweeps large parts of India as mercury set to soar further

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The blistering heat sweeping across large swathes of India continued unabated on Wednesday, with the mercury surging to 48 degree Celsius in Rajasthan's Barmer, the highest temperature recorded in the country this year so far.

Water levels in the Delhi stretch of the Yamuna dropped amid the sweltering heat.

The city also saw power demand reaching a record 8,000 megawatts, with air conditioners, coolers, and refrigerators in homes and offices running at full throttle.

Official data showed that at least 24 places in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Madhya Pradesh recorded maximum temperatures of 45degree Celsius or above on Wednesday.

Maximum temperatures settled at 45 degree in Madhya Pradesh's Ratlam, 44.8 degree in Maharashtra's Akola, 47.7 degree in Haryana's Sirsa, 46.6 degree in Punjab's Bhatinda, 46.1 degree in Gujarat's Kandla, and 45 degree in Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh. Conditions are set to deteriorate further with the India Meteorological Department predicting a rise of three to four degrees in northwest India over the next few days. The Met department issued a red warning for Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and west Uttar Pradesh, emphasising a "very high likelihood" of heat illness and heatstroke. —*PTI*

After outcry, car crash juvie accused shifted to observation home

PUNE, 23 MAY

The teenager is the son of real estate developer Vishal Agarwal **PHOTO: PTI**

Following an outcry over quick bail, a 17-year-old boy allegedly involved in a car accident in Pune that claimed two lives has been shifted to an observation home after an order of the Juvenile Justice Board, an official said on Thursday.

More than 30 minors are currently lodged at the observation home here, located at the same premises where the hearing on the police's review petition in the case involving the teenager took place on Wednesday, the official said.

The Porsche car, allegedly driven by the teenager, who the police claim was drunk at the time, fatally knocked down two motorbike-borne software engineers at Kalyani Nagar in Pune on Sunday.

The teenager, son of real estate developer Vishal Agarwal, 50, was subsequently produced before the JJB which granted him bail hours later. Police later approached the JJB again, seeking a review of its order.

Following an outcry over quick bail, the JJB on Wednesday remanded the boy to the observation home till June 5.

A senior police official said during his stay at the observation home, the juvenile will undergo psychological assessments.

According to advocate Prashant Patil, who represented the teenager at the JJB hearing, the process of deciding whether a juvenile should be treated as an adult accused can take at least two months as reports of psychiatrists and counsellors among others are called for, and then the JJB gives its decision. —*PTI*

Nawazuddin Siddiqui's brother arrested in UP

M'NAGAR, 23 MAY

Bollywood actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui's elder brother Ayazuddin Siddiqui has been arrested in a cheating case in Budhana town here, officials said on Thursday.

Station House Officer (SHO), Budhana, Anand Dev Mishra said, "Ayazuddin Siddiqui was arrested on Tuesday and sent to jail the same day.

The complainant has alleged that Ayazuddin Siddiqui had filed forged orders of the district magistrate's (DM) court in the office of the Consolidation Department here in December 2023. An inquiry found the allegations to be true, the SHO said.

On a complaint lodged by Rajkumar, a reader of the DM, an FIR was lodged against the accused under sections 420 (cheating) and 467 (forgery) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Mishra said. —*PTI*

Police car enters AIIMS ward to arrest accused

RISHIKESH, 23 MAY

- In an unusual move, police drove a car into inside the emergency ward of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rishikesh to arrest a nursing officer. The 26 second video clip from Tuesday has now gone viral. The police wanted to arrest a nursing officer accused of sexually harassing a woman doctor.

In an unusual move, police drove a car into inside the emergency ward of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Rishikesh to arrest a nursing officer. The 26 second video clip from Tuesday has now gone viral. The police wanted to arrest a nursing officer accused of sexually harassing a woman doctor.

The police car is seen driving through a crowded emergency ward, with rows of patients in beds on both sides. A group of security officials are seen clearing the way for the SUV, pushing stretchers carrying patients out of the way. The car zooms ahead with several police officers visible inside it.

According to the police, the nursing officer allegedly sexually harassed a woman doctor inside an operation theatre at the premier health facility.

Satish Kumar, now suspended, had also allegedly sent an obscene SMS to the doctor, Rishikesh police officer Shankar Singh Bisht told news agency

—*PTI*

Students ditch UK varsities for Masters

LONDON, 23 MAY

PHOTO: PTI

Indian students choosing the UK as their higher education destination have started registering a fall, with over 21,000 fewer Master's degree applicants than the previous year being registered in official statistics released in London on Thursday.

According to UK Home Office data based on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) figures, there was a 16 per cent drop in Indian student applicants over the year ending December 2023 in an overall 10 per cent fall in net migration compared to 2022.

While the figures will come as a welcome sign for British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak who has made curbing migration one of his key planks for a general election now set for July 4, the student visa figures will worry universities who rely on overseas student fees.

"There were 116,455 sponsored study visa grants to main applicants that are Indian nationals in the year ending March 2024, (26 per cent of the total), 21,717 fewer than the previous year," the Home Office analysis reads.

"The majority (94,149, or 81 per cent) of Indian students come to the UK to study at Master's level, and the recent decrease in Indian students was driven by 21,800 fewer Indian nationals coming to study at Master's level," it notes. The fall in numbers follows a visa clampdown on students being able to bring their family dependents, spouses or children, from earlier this year. —*PTI*

SCRIPTING HISTORY

Everest sees 1st triple amputee, youngest girl

PANAJI, 23 MAY

Braving physical disabilities, cold weather and bad health, 30-year-old triple amputee Tinkesh Kaushik from Goa never lost his grit and mental strength as he set out on a trek to the Mount Everest Base Camp.

While the first day of preparation for the trek was gruelling, Kaushik promised to himself that he will do it and then nothing could stop him or shake his determination.

Overcoming all odds, he reached the Everest Base Camp, located 17,598 feet above sea level, on 11 May after a week-long journey and hoisted the national tricolour there, happy and proud to have set an example for others with disabilities.

With this, Kaushik has become the world's first triple amputee to reach the Mount Everest Base Camp, Disability Rights Association of Goa (DRAG) chief Avelino D'Souza claimed. Kaushik lost his both limbs below knees and a hand following an electrocution accident in Haryana when he was 9 years old. The amputee, who uses prosthetic limbs, moved to Goa a few years back and has been working as a fitness coach. The amputee said he initially thought the trek would be easy as he is a fitness coach but realised the challenges when he started preparing for it.

Tinkesh Kaushik and Kaamya Karthikeyan **PHOTOS: X /@TINKESHKAUSHIK & X/@IN_WNC**

"I found trekking to be challenging. On the second day, I said that I have to do it. It's a doable trek. In between, my health was bad, I suffered an acute mountain bout (sickness)," he said.

"I faced challenges a couple of times, my health was bad because of mountain sickness and my oxygen level dropped. I suffered from headache and vomiting, but I had the strong desire to complete the mission because I wanted to set an example for people with disabilities that if you have strong mental health, then you can certainly achieve it," he said.

16-year-old becomes youngest Indian to summit Everest

Sixteen-year-old Kaamya Karthikeyan successfully summited Mount Everest, becoming the youngest Indian mountaineer to scale the world's highest peak from the Nepal side, the Indian Navy said on Thursday.

The daughter of a naval officer, Kaamya is a class 12 student at Navy Children School, Mumbai.

Kaamya and her father Cdr S Karthikeyan successfully summited Mt. Everest (8,849 m) on 20 May, according to a statement issued by a Navy spokesperson.

"After this feat, she has become the second youngest girl in the world, and the youngest Indian mountaineer to summit the world's highest peak from the Nepal side," the statement said.

With this, Kaamya has completed six milestones in her mission to summit the highest peak of all seven continents and aims to climb Mount Vinson Massif in Antarctica this December to become the youngest girl to accomplish the '7summits challenge', the Navy said. —*PTI*

BUDDHA PURNIMA

Devotees at Har Ki Pauri ghat on the banks of Ganga on the occasion of Buddha Purnima festival, in Haridwar, on Thursday. The day marks the birth of Gautam Buddha on full moon day. Born as prince Siddhartha Gautama in modern-day Nepal, he experienced a transformative journey that culminated in his enlightenment, referred to as nirvana. It is thought that on this day, Lord Buddha attained enlightenment through meditation beneath a Bodhi tree in Bodh Gaya, Bihar ***PHOTO: PTI***

Why there is a race for 'Net Zero' emissions

Last month, the leaders of the G7 declared their commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. Closer to home, the Albanese government recently introduced legislation to establish a Net Zero Economy Authorit, promising it will catalyse investment in clean energy technologies in the push to reach net zero.

Pledges to achieve net zero emissions over the coming decades have proliferated since the United Nation's 2021 Glasgow climate summit, as governments declare their commitments to meeting the Paris Agreement goal of holding global warming under 1.5°C. But what exactly is "net zero", and where did this concept come from?

In the early 1990s, scientists and governments were negotiating the key article of the UN's 1992 climate change framework: "the stabilisation of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-caused) interference with the climate system". How to achieve that stabilisation – let alone define "dangerous" climate change – has occupied climate scientists and negotiators ever since.

From the outset, scientists and governments recognised reducing greenhouse gas emissions was only one side of the equation. Finding ways to compensate or offset emissions would also be necessary.

The subsequent negotiation of the Kyoto Protocol backed the role of forests in the global carbon cycle as carbon sinks.

It also provided the means for well-forested developing countries to participate in the emerging carbon offset market, and to play their part in reaching the carbon accounting goal of "carbon neutrality". Under those terms, the industrialised countries subject to the Kyoto Protocol could pay developing countries to offset their own emissions as a form of low-cost mitigation.

The Kyoto Protocol was unable to curtail soaring global greenhouse gas emissions, and a successor agreement appeared uncertain. As a result, interest turned in the late 2000s to the possibility of using highly controversial geoengineering techniques to remove greenhouse gas emissions. These proposals included sucking carbon dioxide out of the sky so the atmosphere would trap less heat, or reflecting sunlight away from the planet to reduce heat absorption. The focus on carbon sinks, whether through forests or direct air capture, would appear again in the idea of net zero. The European Union had already adopted the 2°C threshold in 1996 and argued successfully for its relevance as a long-term objective for climate action.

India's aim to reach net zero emissions by 2070 ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

What changed was scientists now had better ways of tracking how long carbon dioxide emissions would stay in the atmosphere. These findings allowed the IPCC's 2014 report to clearly state limiting warming to below 2°C would require "near zero emissions of carbon dioxide and other long-lived greenhouse gases by the end of the century".

London-based environmental lawyer and climate negotiator Farhana Yamin had also set her sights on net zero by 2050. For Yamin, translating the 1.5°C ambition into climate negotiations meant focusing on net zero: "In your lifetime, emissions have to go to zero. That's a message people understand." The concept of net zero offered a simple metric to assess mitigation efforts and hold parties legally accountable – an instrument she and colleagues proposed for the negotiation of a new legally binding agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol.

This is what "net zero" means – a "balance" between carbon emissions and carbon sinks. It was subsequently enshrined in the IPCC's Special Report on the importance of keeping warming under 1.5°C, in which 195 member states agreed to get to net zero emissions by 2050. India have questioned what it means for fairness and equity between developing and developed nations, Instead, they favour the well-established approach of "common but differentiated responsibility" to mitigation. This justifies India's aim to reach net zero emissions by 2070, as developed nations should lead the way and provide developing countries with funds and technologies necessary to support their mitigation ambitions.

As the chair of the UN's High Level Experts group put it: "It's not just advertising, bogus net-zero claims drive up the cost that ultimately everyone would pay. Including people not in this room, through huge impacts, climate migration and their very lives."

Net zero isn't the only approach to tackle climate change. Other concepts are growing in popularity.

For instance, optimists say the temperature "overshoot" is on track for could be tackled with a "drawdown" of carbon emissions if we use "carbon dioxide removal" or "negative emissions technologies" such as carbon capture and storage, soil carbon sequestration, and mass tree planting and reforestation.

—PTI

SALAR

UK polls on 4 July, here's what happens next

Election day has been confirmed for 4 July – in just over six weeks' time.

The UK has to have an election at least every five years but elections can be called at any time within that timeframe. Sunak had to hold a vote before the end of January 2025 but, until this surprise announcement, the country had largely expected an autumn date.

Sunak always said the vote would be in the second half of the year (which July technically is). But it still came as a shock that the vote has been called so early. Many of his own MPs are said to be annoyed at the prospect.

Why is Sunak calling the election now?

Sunak's speech rested on the argument that only he and the Conservative party can lead Britain through the "most challenging" time since the end of the second world war. This is a dangerous argument, as Labour will point to the fact that many of the underlying problems, such as the state of public services and the economic turmoil caused by Liz Truss's mini budget, have been created under (and even by) the Conservative government.

Sunak set the date as soon as it was confirmed that inflation is easing, which is a much needed piece of good news for his government. He may also have planned to surprise Labour, having learned that the opposition was allowing staff to take holidays over the summer, thinking there would not be an election until after the summer recess.

Is the campaign always so short?

"Short campaigns" – the period between the day the election is called and election day itself, are very short in the UK compared to many other countries. They last a minimum of 25 working days and are rarely much longer.

The long campaign, however, is the period of time when parties have a sense that an election is imminent. Given that Sunak was working towards the end of the five-year deadline, the long campaign has been running for some time. All of the UK's political parties have been preparing and they will, or at least should be, largely campaign-ready, even if this all feels sudden to the rest of us.

What happens next?

Sunak has already spoken to king Charles to ask for permission to dissolve parliament. This will happen on 30 May. After that point, technically, there are no MPs (all incumbents who decide to stand become candidates, rather than MPs). Any parliamentary business that has not been completed before that day will be scrapped.

MPs will then start campaigning across the UK's 650 constituencies, hoping to win a parliamentary seat.

Will there be a change of government?

While the last few years has taught us all to never say never in British politics, polls give the Labour party a commanding lead over the incumbent Conservative party.

The Conservative government has been in power since 2010, though this also includes a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats between 2010 and 2015. David Cameron then led a Conservative government without the Liberal Democrats between 2015 and 2016, when he resigned in the wake of the Brexit vote.

Since then, the UK has had four prime ministers – Theresa May (2016-2019), Boris Johnson (2019-2022), Truss (for 49 days in 2022) and Sunak (since October 2022). Sunak will attempt to argue that this makes him still relatively "new", all the while emphasising that he warned that Truss's tax plans were a mistake.

Do all parts of the UK vote?

Yes – voters in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales will vote in the UK election. Although there are devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (and major urban areas of England) each of these areas, along with the rest of England, also elect MPs to sit in the Westminster parliament. However, Labour does not stand candidates in Northern Ireland and if any Sinn Féin candidates win seats in Northern Ireland, they traditionally do not take their seats in Westminster.

When a new prime minister be installed?

When an election result is a clear majority, the leader of the winning party starts as prime minister immediately after the result is confirmed – so there is no transition period, as in the case of the US for example. If there is a change of prime minister, the incumbent must leave Downing Street immediately and their replacement will arrive soon after. British politics is brutal in this respect.

Technically the prime minister is appointed by the monarch, so the election winner's first act is to visit the king. In 2010, when no party won a majority of seats, Gordon Brown remained prime minister for five days after the election while trying (and ultimately failing) to broker a coalition agreement.

Courtesy, The Conversation

Rishi Sunak announced the poll date while getting drenched in the rain, even as protesters drowned his speech by playing New Labour's 1997 anthem 'Things Can Only Get Better' ***PHOTO: X/RISHISUNAK***

LETTERS

write to us at salar@salar.news

There's a need to implement antibiotic protocol in all hospitals

Patients admitted to hospitals for surgery or treatment are susceptible to healthcare-associated infections (HAI) such as central line-associated bloodstream infections, catheter-associated urinary tract infections and ventilator-associated pneumonia. These are exceedingly critical medical conditions to manage, as the bacteria responsible are resistant to even the strongest antibiotics available, a phenomenon referred to as antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

In the face of the onslaught of these superbugs, the hospital staff administer a high dose of antibiotics or one antibiotic after another in the hope that at least one of them might work. Patients in hospitals have low immunity and are often too weak to fight off germs, thereby making the entire treatment procedure complicated. Due to the high levels of exposure to antibiotics in hospital settings, particularly in intensive care units (ICU), these bacteria develop resistance as a natural survival strategy. Termed superbugs, these resistant bacteria cause more dangerous infections that require advanced antibiotics.

A surveillance study conducted by the International Nosocomial Infection Control Consortium in 45 low- and middle-income countries from 2012 to 2017 found that pooled rates of catheter-associated urinary tract infections and central line-associated bloodstream infections were three to six times higher than in intensive care units in the United States.

A 2022 global report by World Health Organisation on infection prevention and control observed that the risk of acquiring HAIs is up to 20 times higher in relatively poor countries.

The situation in India is particularly alarming. According to a report published in medical journal The Lancet in September 2023, a network of 26 tertiary-level hospitals in India established to implement HAI surveillance and prevention activities reported 2,622 healthcare-associated bloodstream infections and 737 healthcare-associated urinary tract infections (UTIs) from 89 ICUs between May 2017 and October 2018.

High levels of resistance to at least one drug of the last-resort carbapenem class of antibiotics were found in HAIs caused by Klebsiella spp. (bloodstream infections 72.4 per cent, UTIs 76.3 per cent), Escherichia coli (bloodstream infections 58 per cent, UTIs 62 per cent), Acinetobacter spp. (bloodstream infections 77.2 per cent, UTIs 75.7 per cent) and Pseudomonas spp. (bloodstream infections 63.7 per cent, UTIs 71.9 per cent). Alarmingly, all of them are dreaded gram-negative pathogens.

The risk of acquiring healthcare-affected infections is up to 20 times higher in poor countries ***PHOTO: PTI***

These antibiograms aid in the appropriate identification of patients at risk and the administration of suitable empiric antibiotic therapy. They are an essential resource for institutions to track changes in AMR and guide empirical antimicrobial therapy.

Another report, Situation analysis: Antibiotic use and resistance in India, based on a study conducted by nonprofit Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership and public health research organisation One Health Trust, has pointed out that in Indian ICUs, the prevalence of vancomycin-resistant enterococcus, a deadly nosocomial infection, was five times higher than in the rest of the world.

The government is aware of the gravity of the situation and has initiated steps towards an antibiotic stewardship programme. The apex biomedical research institution, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), initiated an antibiotic stewardship programme on a pilot project basis in 20 tertiary care hospitals across India to control the misuse and overuse of antibiotics in hospital wards and ICUs.

The government has undertaken several initiatives to address this major public health challenge. One of the key initiatives was the launch of National Programme on AMR Containment, coordinated by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in Delhi. The objective is to enhance the capacity of medical colleges and other large hospitals to generate quality AMR surveillance data and monitor its patterns in the country.

Under this programme, a network of laboratories has been established under the National AMR Surveillance Laboratory Network (NARS-Net). NARS-Net began with eight medical college laboratories through a sentinel surveillance approach. The sentinel surveillance network sites have been progressively expanded to include 40 laboratories in 31 states and Union territories as of March 2023, along with the National Reference Laboratory for Bacterial Pathogens at NCDC.

India had also launched its National Action Plan on AMR (NAP-AMR) in April 2017 with six strategic priorities. These are, improving awareness and understanding of AMR through effective communication, education and training; strengthening knowledge and evidence through surveillance and reducing the incidence of infection through effective infection prevention and control. Optimising the use of antimicrobial agents in health, animals and food; promoting investments for AMR activities, research and innovations and strengthen India's commitment and collaborations on AMR at international, national and sub-national levels are the rest of the priorities. The Union Health Ministry is now planning to prepare a National Action Plan on AMR 2.0.

However, while large tertiary care centres have their own infection control teams, smaller centres often lack the manpower, training and management commitment to dedicate resources for infection control. These centres could be a game changer with enhanced government support, something that could also benefit non-governmental organisations working towards data collection and creating awareness about AMR.

Courtesy, DownToEarth

PHOTO: AP

5 dead, dozens hurt in tornadoes that tore Iowa

GREENFIELD, 23 MAY

A deadly tornado that wreaked havoc in the small city of Greenfield, Iowa, left four people dead and nearly three dozen injured, officials said, while a fifth person was killed elsewhere.

The twister that tore through the city on Tuesday was rated at least an EF-3 by the National Weather Service and was so destructive that it took authorities more than a day to account for the area's residents. It's believed that the number of people injured is likely higher, the Iowa Department of Public Safety said. The fifth person was killed about 40 kilometres from Greenfield when her car was blown off the road in a tornado, according to the Adams County Sheriff's Office. Monica Zamarron, 46, died in the crash Tuesday afternoon, officials said. *—PTI*

Imran Khan seeks live telecast of SC hearing

ISLAMABAD, 23 MAY

Jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought personal appearance and live streaming of the Supreme Court proceedings on his petition seeking to set aside the amendments to the National Accountability Ordinance introduced by the Pakistan Democratic Movement government. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chief submitted an application to the top court in this matter through Adiala jail authorities, Dawn News quoted his counsel as saying. Khan, 71, a week earlier appeared before the top court via video link as a petitioner in the matter but did not get a chance to speak. Talking to the reporters after the hearing in the GBP 190 million corruption case, the cricketer turned-politician said: "I have a match on 30 May in the Supreme Court." *—PTI*

'Unprecedented insurrection in New Caledonia'

PARIS, 23 MAY

French President Emmanuel Macron has described rioting in the French-Pacific territory of New Caledonia as an "unprecedented insurrection movement" that no-one saw coming. During a tour of police headquarters in the capital Nouméa on Thursday, he said the coming days and weeks would be difficult, but Paris would "go until the end" to restore calm. Six people, including two police officers, have been killed and hundreds more wounded in riots, looting and arson triggered by a controversial electoral reform. New Caledonia, a group of islands between Australia and Fiji, has been a French territory since the 19th Century. Tensions have been high between the government and indigenous Kanaks. *—BBC News*

China surrounds Taiwan as punishment

This comes after new Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te told China 'stop threating us'

TAIPEI, 23 MAY

Taiwan scrambled jets and put missile, naval and land units on alert Thursday over Chinese military exercises being conducted around the self-governing island democracy where a new president took office this week.

China's military said its two-day exercises around Taiwan were punishment for separatist forces seeking independence. Beijing claims the island is part of China's national territory and the People's Liberation Army sends navy ships and warplanes into the Taiwan Strait and other areas around the island almost daily to wear down Taiwan's defences and seek to intimidate its people, who firmly back their de facto independence.

China's "irrational provocation has jeopardised regional peace and stability," the island's Defence Ministry said. It said Taiwan will seek no conflicts but "will not shy away from one.

"This pretext for conducting military exercises not only does not contribute to peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, but also shows its hegemonic nature at heart," the ministry's statement said.

In his inauguration address on Monday, Taiwan's President Lai Ching-te called for Beijing to stop its military intimidation and pledged to "neither yield nor provoke"

A Chine ship near Taiwan; (inset) Areas marked in red show Chinese ships encircling Taiwan PHOTO: TAIWAN COAST GUARD

the mainland Communist Party leadership.

Lai has said he seeks dialogue with Beijing while maintaining Taiwan's current status and avoiding conflicts that could draw in the island's chief ally the U.S. and other regional partners such as Japan and Australia.

The People's Liberation Army's Eastern Theater Command said the land, navy and air exercises around Taiwan are meant to test the navy and air capabilities of the PLA units, as well as their joint strike abilities to hit targets and win control of the battlefield, the command said on its official Weibo account.

"This is also a powerful punishment for the separatist forces seeking independence' and a serious warning to external forces for interference and provocation," the statement said.

The PLA also released a map of the intended exercise area, which surrounds Taiwan's main island at five different points, as well as places like Matsu and Kinmen, outlying islands that are closer to the Chinese mainland than Taiwan.

While China has termed the exercises as punishment for Taiwan's election result, the Democratic Progressive Party has now run the island's government for more than a decade, although the pro-China Nationalist Party took a one-seat majority in the parliament. *—AP*

South Korea, China, Japan to hold trilateral talks since 2019

SEOUL, 23 MAY

Leaders of South Korea, China and Japan will meet next week in Seoul for their first trilateral talks in more than four years to discuss how to revive their cooperation, South Korea's presidential office said on Thursday. Since their inaugural stand-alone trilateral summit in 2008, the three countries were supposed to hold such a meeting among their leaders every year. But the summit has been suspended because of the Covid-19 and often-complicated ties among the Asian neighbours since December 2019 in China. The trilateral meeting among South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol, Chinese Premier Li Qiang and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will take place in Seoul, Kim Tae-hyo, Seoul's deputy national security director, told a news conference. Chinese President Xi Jinping will not be attending. During the trilateral meeting, Kim said the three leaders were expected to discuss cooperation on six South Korea-proposed topics — personnel exchanges, climate change, trade, health and aging population, technology & disasters. *—AP*

THE LAST JOURNEY

Iran on Thursday prepared to inter its late president at the holiest site for Shiite Muslims in the Islamic Republic, a final sign of respect for a protégé of Iran's supreme leader killed in a helicopter crash earlier this week.
President Ebrahim Raisi's burial at the Imam Reza Shrine in Mashhad caps days of processionals through much of Iran, seeking to bolster the country's theocracy after the crash that killed him, the country's foreign minister and six others.
PHOTO: EPA

RIPPLING TENSIONS

12 Palestinians killed, 25 wounded by Israel: Hamas

A group of protesters near Tel Aviv PHOTO: X/@COMETLXIX

JERUSALEM, 23 MAY

The Israeli military said Thursday it has completed a two-day operation in the occupied West Bank that the Palestinian Health Ministry says killed 12 Palestinians and wounded 25.

Rippling tensions from the Israel-Hamas war were also felt in the Red Sea, where a missile splashed down in the water near the crucial Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Thursday, but caused no damage, and in Lebanon, an Israeli drone strike killed one person and wounded three school students who were passing nearby in a bus.

More than 400 people have been killed in Lebanon since Israel and Hezbollah began exchanging fire the day after the latest war in Gaza began.

Norway, Ireland and Spain said Wednesday they were recognising a Palestinian state, a move welcomed by Palestinians as an affirmation of their decades long quest while Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries.

It was the second blow to Israel's international reputation this week after the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court said he would seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defence minister.

The International Court of Justice is also considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied. *—AP*

Houthi missile attack misses target in Red Sea

DUBAI, 23 MAY

A missile splashed down in the waters of the Red Sea on Thursday, but caused no damage to a passing commercial vessel in an attack likely carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels, officials said. The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack, though it can take hours or even days for them to acknowledge their assaults.

The attack happened in Red Sea near the crucial Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the British military said.The security firm Ambrey similarly reported the attack. Houthis attacks in recenet months have become very common.

—AP

HALEY TO VOTE FOR TRUMP, NOT 'CATASTROPHE' BIDEN

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

Indian-American former presidential hopeful Nikki Haley has said that she will vote for her ex-opponent and boss Donald Trump in the November US election, breaking her silence on the matter since exiting the Republican presidential primary more than two months ago.

Haley, 52, however, stopped short of an official endorsement. Haley, who once served as Trump's United Nations ambassador, was the last of his major rivals to drop out of the party primary contest, in early March.

"I will be voting for Trump," Haley said on Wednesday in response to a question during her appearance at the Hudson Institute, a top conservative think-tank in the American Capital, as she delivered a speech on national security and foreign policy.

"As a voter, I put my priorities on a president who's going to have the backs of our allies and hold our enemies to account, who would secure the border, no more excuses; a president who would support capitalism and freedom; a president who understands we need less debt, not more debt," she said.

"Trump has not been perfect on these policies. I've made that clear many, many times. But (Joe) Biden has been a catastrophe," she said. *—PTI*

Nikki Haley PHOTO: X/@NIKKIHALEY

- Haley stopped short of an official endorsement. Haley, who once served as Trump's United Nations ambassador, was the last of his major rivals to drop out of the party primary contest, in early March

Indo-Americans candidate wins in Georgia

WASHINGTON, 23 MAY

Ashwin Ramaswami, the first Gen Z Indian-American candidate running for a US state legislature, has won the Democratic primary in the state of Georgia. Susheela Jayapal, the sister of Indian-American Congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, lost her Congressional primary bid in Oregon. "In November, I'll face Republican Senator Shawn Still – who was indicted alongside Donald Trump for being a fake elector in 2020. It's the most flippable State Senate seat," he said. If elected, he would be the youngest ever elected representative in the State of Georgia and the first Indian-American to win this position in Georgia. *—PTI*

UK polls: Sunak blindsides his FM

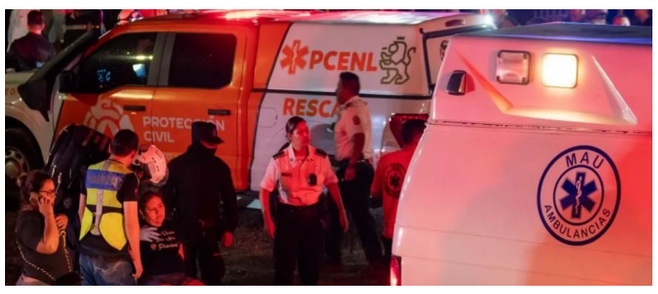
LONDON, 23 MAY

The call of 4 July election in the United Kingdom which was taken by the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was so secret that even his chancellor and the finance minister of the country Jeremy Hunt, surprised by the plan.

Sunak, his Conservative Party colleagues and Opposition Labour Leader Keir Starmer and his shadow cabinet hit the campaign trail with gusto on Thursday, a day after the British Prime Minister surprised many within his ranks by calling an election just six weeks away on 4 July. The 44-year-old British Indian leader's rain-soaked speech on the steps of 10 Downing Street sent the political corridors of the country into a flurry of activity, with Sunak hitting the ground running with a campaign event after with his three poll pitches.

Jeremy Hunt PHOTO: X/@JEREMY_HUNT

"Over the next few weeks, I will fight for every vote," he pledged. Asked by BBC why he chose to fire the starting gun for the election race getting drenched in the pouring rain, Sunak replied that it showed that he is "not a fair-weather politician". *—BBC News*



Emergency services took the injured to various nearby hospitals PHOTO: EPA

Mexico poll rally stage falls amid gust, 9 dead

MEXICO CITY, 23 MAY

At least nine people have been killed, including a child, and about 50 have been injured after part of a stage collapsed at an election rally in Mexico's northern Nuevo León state, the local governor has said.

The incident occurred as centre-left presidential candidate Jorge Alvarez Maynez was delivering a speech in the city of San Pedro Garza Garcia, near Monterrey. Maynez was uninjured in the collapse, and was seen speaking to supporters following the incident. Several members of his team had been hurt, he said. The collapse was caused by a sudden gust of wind, Maynez said in a post on X. Footage has emerged apparently showing the moment the lighting structure collapsed as a number of people were on the stage. Video posted on social media showed Maynez waving to his supporters and then running to the back of the stage for safety as he realised part of the structure was toppling over. People can also be heard screaming and running from the stage. *—BBC News*

PANNUN MURDER PLOT: CZECH JUNKS INDIAN'S PLEA

LONDON, 23 MAY

The Czech Constitutional Court has rejected a petition by Indian national Nikhil Gupta, detained in a prison in Prague, against his extradition to the US to face murder-for-hire charges in an alleged assassination attempt on a Khalistani extremist on American soil.

Gupta, 52, was charged by US federal prosecutors in an indictment unsealed in November last year with working with an Indian government employee in the foiled plot to kill Khalistani separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, who holds dual American and Canadian citizenships, in the US.

Gupta was arrested in Prague, the Czech Republic on 30 June, 2023, and is being held there currently. The US government is seeking his extradition to America. The Czech Constitutional Court heard a petition by Gupta against the extradition. *—PTI*

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ABSENT

Thousands of scribes have fled homelands

UNITED NATIONS, 23 MAY

Thousands of journalists have fled their home countries in recent years to escape political repression, save their lives and escape conflict – but in exile they are often vulnerable to physical, digital and legal threats, a UN investigator said on Wednesday.

Irene Khan said in a report to the UN General Assembly that the number of journalists in exile has increased as the space for independent and critical media has been "shrinking in democratic countries where authoritarian trends are gaining ground".

Today, she said, free, independent and diverse media supporting democracy and holding the powerful to account are either absent or severely constrained.

But Khan, a Bangladeshi lawyer who previously served as secretary general of Amnesty International, said exiled journalists often find themselves in precarious positions, facing threats against them and their families from their home countries without assured legal status or adequate support to continue working in their country of refuge.

"Exile thus becomes yet another way to silence critical voices – another form of press censorship." In recent years, Khan said, hundreds of journalists have fled from Afghanistan, Belarus, China, Ethiopia, Iran, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Russia, Sudan, Somalia, Turkiye and Ukraine. In addition, smaller numbers have fled from a range of other countries including Burundi, Guatemala, India, Pakistan and Tajikistan, "to name just a few", she said.

Khan said there is no data on human rights violations committed by countries outside their borders. Khan said "the butchering of exiled Saudi journalist, Jamal Khashoggi, in the consulate of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul was an outrageous, audacious act of transnational repression".

AN UN investigator Irene Khan said free, independent and diverse media supporting democracy severely constrained PHOTO: X/@TTINDIA

Khashoggi, a Washington Post columnist who entered the consulate on 2 October, 2018, to get documents for his impending marriage, never emerged and his remains have never been found. Online attacks including death threats, rape threats and smear campaigns have skyrocketed in the past 10 years, she said. Digital surveillance also surged over the past decade as spyware enables authorities to access journalists' phones and other devices without their knowledge.

Hong Kong's recently adopted National Security Law, augmented by the Safeguarding National Security Ordnance. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Khan said, it adopted draconian laws punishing anyone discrediting the armed forces or disseminating false information about the military operation. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

IndiGo to introduce business class in flights this year

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The country's largest airline IndiGo on Thursday said it will introduce business class in flights on the busiest routes this year. Details on product offering, launch date and routes will be unveiled around its 18th anniversary in August."In a groundbreaking move to redefine business travel in India, IndiGo, India's most preferred airline, announces the plan to launch a tailor-made business product for India's busiest and business routes," the airline said in a release. IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said it is constantly looking at innovating service offerings. "We believe, as India gears up to become the third largest economy in the world, it's our privilege to provide the New India even more options to choose from as they travel business. We are excited with this new phase in IndiGo's evolution and strategy and aim to further give wings to the nation," he said.*—PTI*

Gold plunges ₹1,050 to ₹73,550/10 g

NEW DELHI,23 MAY

Extending the downside for the second straight session, gold prices sharply tumbled by Rs 1,050 to Rs 73,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a decline in precious metal rates globally. Gold slid sharply following the release of the Federal Reserve's hawkish meeting minutes, which indicated that the US Fed officials are in no rush to cut rates, with "many" questioning whether a higher-for-longer policy is restrictive enough, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 74,600 per 10 grams.In addition, silver prices also plummeted by Rs 2,500 to Rs 92,600 per kg. It had closed at Rs 95,100 per kg in the previous session. "Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,550 per 10 grams, down by Rs 1,050, taking bearish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,375 per ounce, down USD 42 from the previous close. Silver also trading lower at USD 30.80 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 31.75 per ounce.*—PTI*

Market hits peak post RBI's dividend announcement

The NSE Nifty inched closer to the record 23,000 mark

MUMBAI, 23 MAY

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty rallied more than 1.6 per cent to close at lifetime high levels on Thursday following buying in banking, oil and auto shares and a record dividend payout by the RBI to the government.

Regaining the 75,000 level after its best single-day gain since 29 January, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed at all-time peak of 75,418.04, up by 1,196.98 points or 1.61 per cent over the last close. During the day, it zoomed 1,278.85 points or 1.72 per cent to reach its all-time intra-day high of 75,499.91.

The NSE Nifty inched closer to the record 23,000 mark during the day. It went up by 369.85 points or 1.64 per cent to 22,967.65. During the day, it jumped 395.8 points or 1.75 per cent to 22,993.60 -- its intra-day record peak.

Among the Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, Axis Bank, Maruti, UltraTech Cement, IndusInd Bank, HDFC Bank, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Titan, Tata Consultancy Services and Reliance Industries were the major gainers.

Sun Pharma, PowerGrid and NTPC were the laggards.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed at all-time peak of 75,418.04, up by 1,196.98 points or 1.61 per cent over the last close. *PHOTO: PTI*

The Reserve Bank of India will pay a record Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government for the fiscal ended March 31, more than double of budgeted expectation, helping shore up revenue ahead of a new government taking office.

The RBI board, at its 608th meeting on Wednesday, approved the transfer of surplus, the central bank said in a statement.

"Today, there was enthusiasm in the equity market after the RBI approved a Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government. This indicates a better fiscal position and softer bond yields going forward. As a result of this positive move, we are seeing some short covering in the market. If the election outcome aligns with current market expectations, we expect Nifty to reach new highs in the first week of June," said Neeraj Chadawar, Head – Fundamental and Quantitative Research, Axis Securities.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading mostly in the green. Wall Street ended in negative territory on Wednesday.

- Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.33 per cent to USD 82.17 a barrel.Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 686.04 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

"The Nifty index has surged to a record high after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a substantial Rs 2.1 lakh crore dividend to the government. This development is a significant macroeconomic positive for the market, with direct implications for the fiscal deficit and bond yields," Santosh Meena, Head of Research at Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.33 per cent to USD 82.17 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 686.04 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 267.75 points or 0.36 per cent to settle at 74,221.06 on Wednesday. The NSE Nifty advanced 68.75 points or 0.31 per cent to finish at 22,597.80.

—PTI

FAME -II SCHEME

'Hero, Okinawa could be blacklisted from all schemes'

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Three electric vehicle makers, Hero Electric, Okinawa and Benling India, which failed to return the benefits wrongly claimed under the government's flagship FAME-II scheme, could be blacklisted from all central schemes, officials said.

In 2022, complaints were received by the Ministry of Heavy Industries regarding flouting of the FAME-II guidelines by various original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) registered under the scheme, alleging that they were selling electric vehicles in violation of the local sourcing requirements and engaged in rampant imports of vehicle parts.

The ministry investigated 13 companies, out of which six were found to be violating the Faster Adoption of Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME-II) norms, including Hero Electric, Okinawa Autotech, Benling India Energy and Technology, AMO Mobility, Greaves Electric Mobility, and Revolt Motors.

Out of these companies AMO Mobility, Greaves Electric Mobility and Revolt Motors returned the subsidy amount along with interest within a few months and got a clean chit from the government.

However, Hero Electric, Okinawa Autotech, and Benling India did not return the incentives and were consequently de-registered from the FAME-II scheme.

"Hero Electric, Okinawa Autotech and Benling India were deregistered. After that, the next step is debarment from all schemes of the Ministry, that has been done for Hero Electric and Benling India. Okinawa was not debarred because they were in court at the time.

"The next step is blacklisting from all schemes under the Government of India. That has not happened so far because it is a step-by-step process and the Ministry of Finance gives the approval for debarment from all the ministries' schemes/policies for any company," a senior official told PTI.Separate emails seeking comments from each of the three companies could not elicit any immediate response.

—PTI

JSW group aims at ₹5K cr sales by FY26

NEW DELHI, 23 JAN

JSW Paints crossed Rs 2,000 crore in revenue from operation in FY24 and logged its first operating profit in five years of inception, a top company official said on Thursday.

The JSW Group firm, which aims for Rs 5,000 crore revenue in the next two years, is expanding its retail presence in the home decorative business and adding more products in the industrial coating business, company's Joint Managing Director & CEO Sundaresan AS said.

"We have been able to achieve operating breakeven this year (FY24)," Sundaresan told PTI.

JSW Paints, which is among the new entrants in the fast-growing Indian paints industry, is aiming "to grow much faster than the market".

"We aim to keep growing anywhere from five to 10 times the market growth. In the current year (FY24), We have grown 10 times the rest of the industry," he said adding that JSW Paints is bringing new products into the market, expanding its reach and network and continuing to invest in building the brands.

PHOTO: PTI

JSW Paints has so far invested Rs 900 crore for its decorative and industrial coating business.

Regarding the paints market, Sundaresan said, the industry has been growing at double-digit in the last few decades and is expected to do so going forward.

It is a growing market and has a place for newcomers in the segment.

In the Indian paints market, in the last four to -fiveyears, several new players including Aditya Birla Group, Pidilite and some others have entered into the segment.

—PTI

INVESTMENT GAME ON

Past decade saw most public and private sector investments

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

India spent USD 8 trillion in new investments over the past decade, over half of what the country has done since its independence, according to a report put out by DSP Asset Managers.

Over the last seven and a half decades, that means since India's Independence in 1947, USD 14 trillion has been spent on investments, including spending on housing by households, infrastructure creation by the government, and private capital expenditure.

India has spent USD 8 trillion on new investments over the last 10 years. The government in each of its annual budgets has been increasing capital expenditure allocations.

As the base becomes large, the investments made in the past decade is expected to repeat itself in the next five years, the DSP report said.

"The size of India's annual investments is becoming large enough for it to get your immediate attention," it said.

The report asserted that India has come out of an investment winter.

India spent USD 8 trillion in new investments over the past decade over half of what the country has done since its Independence *PHOTO: PTI*

The investment to GDP ratio (measured as Gross Fixed Capital Formation to GDP) peaked in 2011 and remained low until the Covid-led disruption upended the supply chains.Post-pandemic recovery and a large push through government expenditure, the investments are making a comeback."While the global economic landscape has been a bit wobbly, India has remained a steady ship in choppy waters. The economic growth has been consistently strong with corporate top line and profit growing steadily."

Over the past 12 months, most economies have seen a slowdown in their manufacturing sector or services or both, the report said, supporting its arguments by putting out a graph where

India's manufacturing PMI could be seen on the top.

A stable external situation is behind the country's growth story, it asserted.

Most emerging market currencies are struggling with negative carry against the US Dollar, which forced the central banks of these countries to be cautious in FX policy and setting their interest rates

—ANI

IRDAI INTRODUCES NEW REGULATIONS FOR INSURERS

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has come out with a master circular to provide various operational and procedural aspects, to be adopted by all insurers.

Among other things, the insurance sector watchdog asked insurance companies to seek prior approval for the appointment of their Board Chairperson, effective immediately.

Existing Chairpersons have been given until 31 March, 2026, or the end of their current terms, whichever comes first, to comply with the new norm.

Master circular titled "Master Circular on Corporate Governance for Insurers, 2024" shall apply to all insurers except foreign companies engaged in re-insurance business through a branch established in India.

The circular becomes effective upon issuance. However, insurers are given time up to 30 June, 2024, to ensure compliance with its provisions. Further, where specific timelines are specified for certain compliances, such timelines shall remain the same. *—ANI*

Sony to focus on creativity, games and IPs, not gadgets

TOKYO, 23 MAY

Japanese electronics and entertainment company Sony says it's focusing on creativity in movies, animation and video games, rather than old-fashioned gadgetry.

Its chief executive, Kenichiro Yoshida, outlined the company's strategy on Thursday, saying Sony was helping creative professionals deliver what he called "kando", or a moving experience.

Yoshida did not speak about reports Tokyo-based Sony and Apollo Global Management are interested in buying Paramount Global.

PHOTO: PTI

Yoshida said the company is now emphasising the creative process itself instead of prized products of the past like the Walkman portable music player and Trinitron colour TVs.

He said "synergies" are no longer between entertainment and electronics, but determined by intellectual property spanning animation, music, games and films."We will continue to support people's creativity through our technology," he said in an online briefing.Sony is adapting to tougher times, with rivals making cheaper but competitive electronics. Critics say venturing into movies, music and other entertainment can be unprofitable.

Sony recently reported its quarterly profit rose to 189 billion yen (USD 1.2 billion) from 141 billion yen the year before. Quarterly sales for the maker of the PlayStation game machines rose 14 per cent to 3.48 trillion yen (USD 22 billion). But for the fiscal year through March, Sony recorded a 3 per cent decline in profit at 970 billion yen (USD 6.2 billion) due to a weak performance.

—AP

PURAVANKARA

PHOTO: PTI

Puravankara posts ₹6.71 cr loss in March quarter

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Realty firm Puravankara Ltd on Thursday reported a consolidated net loss of Rs 6.71 crore for the March 2024 quarter on higher expenses. The company had posted a net profit of Rs 26.75 crore in the year-ago period. According to a regulatory filing, the total income rose to Rs 946.84 crore in the fourth quarter of the last fiscal as against Rs 446.39 crore in the corresponding period of the preceding year. Total expenses surged to Rs 942.78 crore in the January-March period as compared to Rs 478.78 crore in the year-ago period. During the full 2023-24 fiscal, the company's net profit declined to Rs 42 crore from Rs 66.52 crore in the preceding year. Total income increased to Rs 2,260.10 crore in FY24 over Rs 1,406.99 crore a year ago.Puravankara is one of the leading real estate developers in the country. It has a presence in South and West India.*—PTI*

Solex partners with GMEE SC Solar for expansion project

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Homegrown Solex Energy on Thursday announced a partnership with China-based entities GMEE SC Solar and ATW for supply of advance manufacturing lines for the company's 800-MW expansion project.

Based in Surat, the company is in process to expand its solar module manufacturing capacity to 1.5 gigawatt (GW), from 700 megawatt (MW) at present, in Tadkeshwar, Gujarat.

In a statement, Solex Energy Ltd said it has signed two separate agreements with GMEE SC Solar and Wuxi Tidewinner Industrial International Co Ltd (ATW) for the supply of advance manufacturing lines with end-to-end automation.

This high-speed production line will be equipped to manufacture high-efficiency N-Type TopCon modules and Heterojunction Solar Cells (HJT) technology-based modules, significantly boosting production capacity. "By integrating advanced automation and artificial intelligence (AI), we are setting new standards for quality and efficiency in PV module production. This move aligns with our vision for FY 2025-26 to expand our production capacity to cater to the growing global demand for high-quality made-in-India modules," said Chetan Shah, Chairman and Managing Director of Solex Energy Limited.

SOLEX OWN YOUR POWER...

PHOTO: PTI

—PTI

RCAP ADMINISTRATOR SEEKS 90-DAY EXTENSION FROM NCLT

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The administrator of debt-ridden Reliance Capital (RCap) has moved NCLT, seeking a 90-day extension beyond the deadline to implement the resolution plan submitted by the successful bidder, the Hinduja Group.

The deadline for the implementation of the approved resolution plan was 27 May, 2024.

"This is to inform the stakeholders that an application under Section 60(5) of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, read with Rule 11 of the National Company Law Tribunal Rules, 2016 for seeking an extension of 90 days from 27 May, 2024, for the implementation of the Approved Resolution Plan was filed before the NCLT by the successful resolution applicant," the company said in a regulatory filing. *—PTI*

KOHLI, ANUSHKA'S VENTURE

Go Digit debuts at 5% premium over IPO price

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Shares of Go Digit General Insurance Ltd, backed by Canada-based Fairfax, got listed on Thursday and ended with a premium of over 12 per cent against the issue price of Rs 272.

The stock began the trade at Rs 281.10, up 3.34 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. During the day, it climbed 15.44 per cent to Rs 314. Shares of the company ended at Rs 305.75 apiece, up 12.40 per cent.

On the NSE, it listed at Rs 286, reflecting a jump of 5.14 per cent. The stock ended at Rs 305.65 each, up 12.37 per cent.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 28,043.46 crore.

In volume terms, 18.56 lakh shares of the company were traded on the BSE and 541.21 lakh shares exchanged hands on the NSE during the day.

The company's market valuation stood at Rs 28,043.46 crore *PHOTO: PTI*

- The stock began the trade at Rs 281.10, up 3.34 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. During the day, it climbed 15.44 per cent to Rs 314. Shares of the company ended at Rs 305.75 apiece, up 12.40 per cent

The initial public offering (IPO) of Go Digit General Insurance received 9.6 times subscription on the closing day of the share-sale on Friday.

The Rs 2,615-crore initial share sale had a price band of Rs 258-272 per share.

Cricketer Virat Kohli and his wife and actor Anushka Sharma are among the investors in the firm. They did not sell any stake in the IPO.

Go Digit offers motor insurance, health insurance, travel insurance, property insurance, marine insurance, liability insurance, and other insurance products to meet the needs of the customers.

It is one of the first non-life insurers in India to be fully-operated on the cloud and has developed application programming interface (API) integrations with several channel partners. *—PTI*

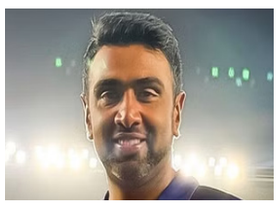


PHOTO: PTI

High scores in IPL due to batters' skills: Ashwin

AHMEDABAD, 23 MAY

Ravichandran Ashwin does not want to single out impact player rule as the only contributing factor in high scores being recorded several times this IPL, as the premier India spinner attributes it to the evolution of batters. Ashwin also has urged bowlers to start working on their batting skills to meet the demands of the game. The season has witnessed some astonishing batting records teams crossed the 200-run mark for a staggering 41 times whereas the 250 mark was breached on eight instances in the league round. IPL's record-highest team total of 287 was also registered in the ongoing edition. "Even if the impact player rule wasn't there, scores would be this high," Ashwin said on JioCinema Match Centre.—*PTI*

Sports Ministry OKs foreign training for Lakshya, Sindhu

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

Indian shuttlers Lakshya Sen and PV Sindhu will train in France and Germany respectively as part of their Olympic preparations after the Sports Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell approved financial assistance to cover the cost for both of them. Sen had sought financial assistance for a 12-day training session in Marseille, France. Sen, who will compete in the men's singles event in Paris, will train at The Halle des Sports Parsemain with his coach and support staff from 8 to 21 July ahead of the Olympic Games. Sindhu's proposal was for Saarbrucken, Germany to train at the Hermann-Neuberger Sportschule. She will practice there for over a month along with her coach and support staff before heading to Paris.—*PTI*

Battle of nerves: SRH up against RR's spin

Ashwin's form has improved at back end of tournament

CHENNAI, 23 MAY

IPL's best power-hitters Travis Head and Abhishek Sharma will face a very different challenge in wily spin twins Yuzvendra Chahal and Ravichandran Ashwin when Sunrisers Hyderabad take on Rajasthan Royals in a high-octane second Qualifier here on Friday at 7.30 pm.

'Travishek' as the duo is affectionately called by the fans has taken power-hitting to a new level. Head (533 runs at 199.62) and Abhishek (470 at 207.04) have hit 72 sixes apart from 96 boundaries between them. If that's not enough, they have a swashbuckler in Heinrich Klaasen (413 runs at 180), who also has 34 maximums to his credit.

The ball stops and stroke-makers do have a tough time when it comes to hitting through the line.

Ashwin, who has played all his cricket at this ground, knows the strip like the back of his hand and his form has improved towards the back end of the tournament.

Sunrisers Hyderabad'S Pat Cummins and Rajasthan Royals' Sanju Samson *PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/@IPL20 @RAJASTHANROYALS*

With the country's best leg-spinner Chahal for company, Royals would be hoping that Head, Abhishek, and Klaasen can be disposed of quickly to gain control of the proceedings.

As for their bowling, the onus would once again be on T Natarajan, who has been SRH's top wicket-taker this season, and playing on his home turf here, he would love to exploit the conditions.

—*PTI*

MALAYSIA MASTERS

PV Sindhu struggles past Sim Yu Jin to enter quarter finals

KUALA LUMPUR, 23 MAY

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu survived a scare before prevailing over Korea's Sim Yu Jin in three games to enter the quarterfinals of the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

World No. 15 Sindhu, a former world champion, saw off Sim 21-13 12-21 21-14 in a 59-minute women's singles second-round match to register her third win over the Korean world number 34.

The 28-year-old from Hyderabad hasn't been able to hit top form ever since returning to action following a knee injury sustained in October last year.

Sindhu, seeded fifth, will next face top seed Han Yue in a revenge match. The Chinese had defeated her in their last meeting at the Asia Badminton Championships in Ningbo last month. Sindhu, who last won a title in the 2022 Singapore Open, has an overwhelming 5-1 head-to-head record against

Sindhu, seeded 5th, will face top seed Han Yue *PHOTO: X/@PVSINDHU1*

Han, who is now ranked world number 6.

Sindhu was left to do the catching-up job in the opening game as she trailed 3-7. But she fought her way back and grabbed a slender 11-10 advantage at the break. The Indian then reeled off seven points to run away with the opening game.

The second game was a tight affair as the two fought hard with Han managing to take a one-point advantage at the interval. She snatched the momentum after the resumption.

The Korean was soon up 14-10 and went on to win seven of the next nine points to roar back into the contest.

Sim once again made a positive start to move to a 5-1 lead in the decider. But Sindhu clawed back at 6-6 before the Koreans were up 9-8 at one stage.

The Indians then took control and zoomed to 13-9 before a five-point burst from 16-14 to seal the contest. —*PTI*

We need bowlers with specific skills: Flower

AHMEDABAD, 23 MAY

Raw pace alone will never be enough to win T20 games consistently at Chinnaswamy where bowlers with different skill sets, executing a specific plan will be required in RCB set-up, head coach Andy Flower said after his team's exit from IPL Eliminator.

While RCB had a brilliant run at the back-end with six straight wins and qualified for the 'Eliminator', the team lost most of its games at the Chinnaswamy with none of the pacers -- Mohammed Siraj (ER 9.18), Lockie Ferguson (ER 10.62), Yash Dayal (ER 9.14), Recce Topley (ER 11.200, Karn Sharma (ER 10.58) haven't exactly set the stage on fire. "You certainly need highly skillful bowlers at (M) Chinnaswamy (Stadium). Simply pace is not going to be the answer there. You need skillful, intelligent bowlers and people that can bowl to really specific plans at Chinnaswamy," Flower said.

Andy Flower *PHOTO: PTI*

With the mega auction scheduled to take place before the next IPL, Flower wants RCB to pick specific kinds of players. "I don't want to talk about that stuff yet — I'm still digesting what's happened in this game. (But) I do think though as part answer to your question, the Chinnaswamy has some particular qualities that we need to be able to exploit," Flower said when asked what the franchise's approach will be for the next year.

Haven't applied, won't apply for India coach's job: Andy Flower

Royal Challengers Bengaluru head coach Andy Flower has no plans ofthrowing his hat in the ring for the India coach's job, the former Zimbabwe skipper confirmed after his team's exit from the IPL playoffs.Rahul Dravid won't be continuing after the T20 World Cup and BCCIhas invited fresh applications with May 27 being the deadline."I haven't applied.

I won't be applying. I am happy with myinvolvement in the franchise game at the moment," the 56-year Flower saidat a press conference on Wednesday.Gautam Gambhir is believed to have been sounded out but neitherthe former India opener nor the BCCI brass have confirmed the development. Flower, who was a successful red-ball coach for England, hadguided the Alastair Cook-led team to a Test series win in India back in 2012.Flower had earlier coached Lucknow Super Giants and is also partof various other franchises across the globe. he said 10 months a year for anational team isn't something that he is considering at this point." —*PTI*

Atalanta celebrates with the trophy after winning the Europa League final soccer match between Atalanta and Bayer Leverkusen at the Aviva Stadium in Dublin *PHOTO: PTI*

LEVERKUSEN'S UNBEATEN RUN ENDS 3-0

DUBLIN, 23 MAY

Atalanta winger Ademola Lookman was unstoppable and Bayer Leverkusen's impossible dream of completing an entire season unbeaten with a hat trick of titles proved to be just that.

Instead, Lookman was the hat trick hero in Atalanta's 3-0 win over Leverkusen in the Europa League final on Wednesday.It was a beating few saw coming for the new German champion whose European record unbeaten run was stopped at 51 games by a team that had won 3-0 in Liverpool in the quarterfinals. Lookman, the London-born Nigeria international, was ruthless punishing big errors by Leverkusen players to score twice in the first 26 minutes of a game where the favorites never looked at ease. He capped his solo show with an arrowing shot in the 75th."It's one of the best nights of my life," said the 26-year-old Lookman.

—*AP*

Olympics: NRAI may announce shooting squad in 2 batches

NEW DELHI, 23 MAY

The Indian shooting contingent for the Paris Olympics could be announced in two batches with the National Rifle Association of India also likely to keep a reserve third shooter in each category in the event of a drop in form of the selected athletes, sources close to the developments said on Thursday.A series of four selection trials in pistol and rifle events concluded on May 19 and the squad for Paris is to be announced shortly, but the source said that the 21-member squad could be announced in two batches ."The federation could announce the rifle/pistol and shotgun squads separately," said the source."The situation has arisen as Manu Bhaker had topped both the 10m air and 25m sports pistol trials held in Delhi and Bhopal.—*PTI*

Not my lifestyle: Ponting says no, thank you to coaching India team

PANAJI, 23 MAY

Australia great Ricky Ponting has revealed that he was approached for the soon-to-be-vacant India head coach position but he has declined the offer as it doesn't fit into his "lifestyle" right now.

Ponting, who recently completed seven seasons as the head coach of the Delhi Capitals IPL franchise, has been Australia's interim T20 coach in the past. He did not say whether the feelers for India's position came from the BCCI.

"…There were a few little one-on-one conversations during the IPL, just to get a level of interest from me as to whether I would do it,"

Ricky Ponting *PHOTO: PTI*

Ponting told the ICC.

"I'd love to be a senior coach of a national team, but with the other things that I have in my life and wanting to have a bit of time at home…Everyone knows if you take a job working with the Indian team, you can't be involved in an IPL team, so it would take that out of it as well.

—*PTI*

Verstappen welcomes a Monaco challenge

MONACO, 23 MAY

Formula 1 champion Max Verstappen welcomes McLaren's surge in form ahead of the Monaco Grand Prix this weekend.

He only just held off Lando Norris last Sunday to win the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix, beating the McLaren driver by .725 seconds. It was far removed from the crushing winning margins Verstappen enjoyed with Red Bull last year in a season of record dominance."It's good for the sport that more teams are fighting for the win," Verstappen said on Thursday at the Monaco GP.

"For sure, things have (tightened) up which, from our side, makes it important to be at our very best."

—*AP*

FRENCH OPEN

Nadal to face Zverev in first round

PARIS, 23 MAY

Rafael Nadal is in the French Open field after all, and the 14-time champion was set up for a challenging first-round matchup against Alexander Zverev from Thursday's draw.

Nadal had been coy about whether he would compete at Roland Garros after two seasons of off-and-on action because of injuries, including a surgically repaired hip that forced him to miss his favorite tournament a year ago.

After a loss at the Italian Open this month, Nadal said he needed to think about whether to play in Paris. But he has been practicing on the red clay at Roland Garros this week, and his name was officially in the bracket.

His matchup against No. 4-ranked Zverev is a rematch of their 2022 semifinal that ended when Zverev tore ligaments in his right ankle.

Rafael Nadal *PHOTO: X / @RAFAELNADAL*

Nadal is 7-3 in head-to-head matchups with Zverev and has won five of their six meetings on clay, losing only in the 2021 Madrid quarterfinals.

In other notable men's matchups, No. 1 seed Novak Djokovic will begin his title defense against France's Pierre-Hugues Herbert and Andy Murray's likely final French Open will start against Stan Wawrinka in the first round. Carlos Alcaraz will begin against a qualifier, and newly crowned Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner will first face American Christopher Eubanks. —*PTI*

Bhoi smashes clean and jerk record for gold at IWF

LIMA, 23 MAY

Indian weightlifter Preetismita Bhoi smashed the youth clean and jerk world record in the women's 40kg category to win a gold medal at the IWF World Youth Championships here. The 15-year-old bettered the existing record of 75kg by 1kg here on Wednesday. She lifted 57kg in snatch for a total effort of 133kg, finishing within 2kg of the youth world standard on total on the opening day of the competition It was a 1-2 finish for India as Jyoshna Sabar clinched the silver with a total effort of 125kg (56kg+69kg).—*PTI*

PARIS OLYMPICS

Panghal in focus as Indian boxers fight in final qualifiers

BANGKOK, 22 MAY

Indian pugilists will be determined to overcome the recent setbacks both inside and outside the boxing ring when they aim for the last available tickets to the Olympic Games at the second World Qualification Tournament, starting here on Friday.

Up until the last qualifying event, Indian boxers had four quotas but in an unprecedented embarrassment, that number is now down to three after women's 57kg holder Parveen Hooda was handed a 22-month ban for whereabouts failure this month. The boxers' performance at the previous world qualifiers in March was dismal, to say the least with only 2023 world championship bronze-medallist Nishant Dev moving past the opening round. The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has made several changes with India's lone male world championship silver-medallist Amit Panghal finally back in the mix after Deepak Bhoria failed to win a quota in the first two qualifying events in the 51kg category.

Abhinash Jamwal has been handed an opportunity to cut his debut Olympics after the seasoned Shiva Thapa's repeated failures in the 63.5kg weight class, which has five quotas on offer.

National Champion Arundhati Choudhary (66kg) will be the third Indian female boxer in the fray.

Amit Panghal *PHOTO: PTI*

With 188 boxers having already earned Olympic berths via the continental qualifiers and the world qualifiers, Indian boxers are expected to add to the tally of three quotas. "Our boxers are in a good mental position now. The confidence from the sparring sessions has risen and psychologists are playing a key role in keeping them away from pressure," Kuttappa said. The tournament has 51 quota places on offer, including 23 for women and 28 for men, and a boxer will be assured of a Paris ticket after reaching the semifinals.

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India had an unprecedented nine boxers competing at the Tokyo Olympics, which yielded one medal -- a bronze by Lovlina Borgohain.

Nikhat Zareen (50kg), Preeti Pawar (54kg), and Borgohain (75kg) secured their entry to Paris at the Asian Games last year. **Squad**:

Women: Jasmine Lamboria (57kg), Ankushita Boro (60kg), Arundhati Choudhary (66kg).

Men: Amit Panghal (51kg), Sachin Siwach Jr. (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg), Nishant Dev (71kg), Abhimanyu Loura (80kg), Sanjeet (92kg), Narender Berwal (+92kg). —*PTI*